

Portland Fire Apparatus Across History

Compiled by Don Porth

This article will share the highlights of the equipment Portland Fire used to serve the community, beginning in 1853. All apparatus are not shown. This represents key equipment and the unique stories that they brought to their service with the city. A full catalogue of Portland Fire apparatus can be found at www.PortlandFireHistory.com.

The First Fire Apparatus...A Bucket!

Like most communities, fire protection evolved out of need. It typically came before law enforcement services, which speaks to community concern about the threat of fire. Fire could be devastating, as was evidenced by fires like the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, the 1871 fire of Peshtigo, Wisconsin (which occurred simultaneously with the Great Chicago Fire, but killed three times as many people), and even “Black Saturday,” the 1873 conflagration that leveled 22 square blocks of Portland. Even with fire protection in place, these notable fires took lives and property.

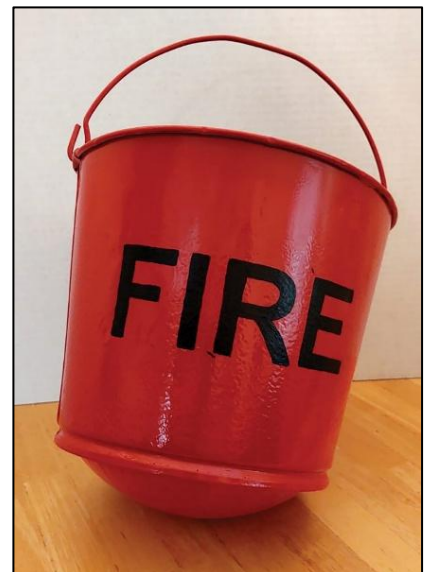
Before machines were common, firefighting was a laborious task that required the help of the entire community. Bucket brigades were the first organized efforts. Community members would create two lines from a water source (typically a pond, river, or ditch) and shuttle water between citizens to move full buckets to the firefighters closest to the fire. Empty buckets were returned in a second line, and the cycle would repeat. Citizen help was important since firefighters needed to remain available to attack the fire as best they could with buckets and ladders.

Innovations like fire pumps would be created to make firefighting more efficient. But water still needed to travel from the source to the fire pump. Bucket brigades would remain useful for this. As the loaded bucket arrived at the fire pump, it was poured into a reservoir or box, which fed a hand powered pump. The pump would move water through a hose that would be directed by firefighters.

Buckets for firefighting were so important that communities would often require each home to have a



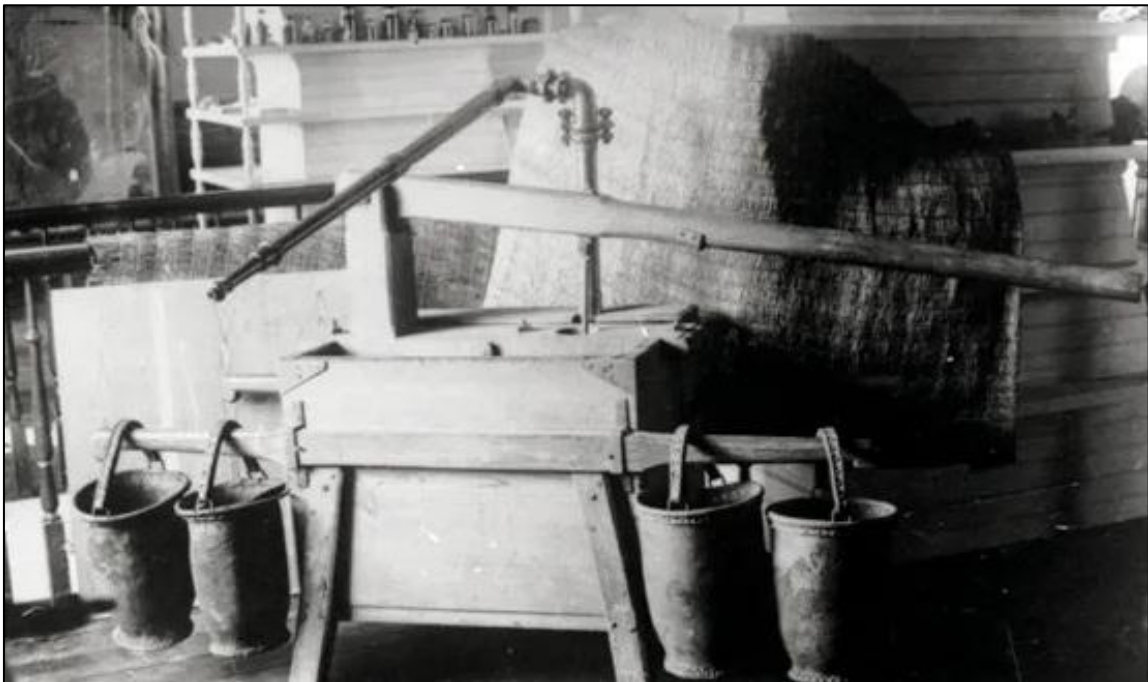
dedicated fire bucket hanging on a hook, ready for use at a moment's notice. When the call of “fire” went out, everyone was to grab their fire bucket and bring it to the scene. To avoid losing the buckets to other uses, special designs discouraged this. While originally leather, fire buckets would later be made from metal and further, be built with round bottoms so they could not be used for other purposes.



The First Portland Fire Engine

Portland's fire protection plans began much like any other community. An 1849 sawmill fire brought the first attention to the need for a firefighting force. But it would not be until August of 1853 that an organized firefighting force would be put into service.

Willamette Engine Company #1 would begin service on August 6, 1853, following Vigilance Hook and Ladder Company by just a few days (August 2, 1853). The first fire engine was pieced together by a volunteer named David Monastes. Monastes was mechanically inclined and took on the task of refurbishing two old Farnham hand pumps that had been procured by Portlander H.B. Otway the year before. The lack of care had taken its toll on the machines and Monastes was only able to salvage one pump by combining parts from the two. This would become Portland's first fire engine. The wheel-less machine would be carried by volunteers to the fire scene, set in place, and the "brakes" pumped to move water. While no picture exists, it might have looked something like this:



Since firefighters could not be dedicated to pumping the brakes on the hand pumper, (they were needed to raise ladders and forward hose lines to the fire), manning the pumps became a requirement of able-bodied men. Refusal to help was punishable by fines. Portland City Ordinance No. 11, dated May 22, 1854, stated in part:

That any person or persons may be called upon to assist the Fire Department and failure to comply with this order is punishable by fine . . . Physicians, whilst engaged in their professional duties, are exempt from this order . .

So, the first fire apparatus to serve Portland and Willamette Engine Company #1 was a simple hand pump, minus wheels, carried to the scene by firefighters. And what about Vigilance Hook and Ladder? That story will take another 12 years to come into focus.

Hand Pumpers – The Technology of the Day

Between 1853 and 1866, hand pumpers ruled the day. These machines would grow bigger and more powerful as the technology developed. The 1853 Farnham (no photos have been found) was followed by a Vaughn Hand Pump, assigned to Multnomah Engine Company #2 when they went into service in 1854. Unfortunately, no photos are known to exist, but it is believed to have come with wheels to make it easier to move.

In 1856, Willamette Engine #1 would require a new pumper and a Smith Hand Pumper was purchased by the City of Portland. No local photos have been found but the internet shows a photo with signage that credits it to Portland. By looking at other commercially produced Smith Handpumpers of that era, and piecing together images and stories of other Portland Fire apparatus, it seems likely that this is Portland's first Smith hand pumper (third apparatus to serve Portland).



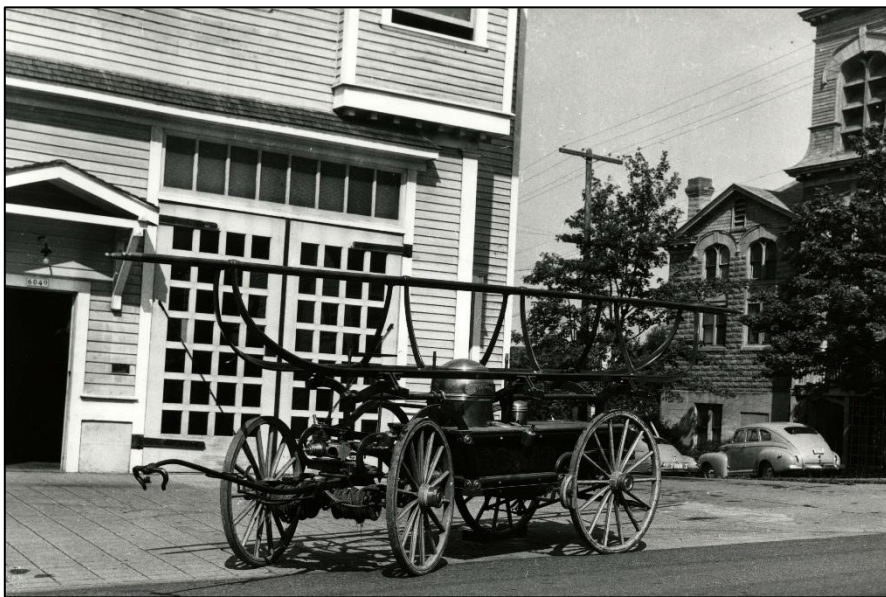
Portland would purchase its next hand pumper in 1858, manufactured by Hunneman. A grainy photo of a gathering in Portland, perhaps celebrating statehood in 1859, shows the Hunneman surrounded by community members.



Handpumpers Continued

In 1859, Columbian Engine Company #3 would begin service and also need a fire engine. An order was placed for a Jeffers hand pumper, which was manufactured in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. It would be ordered and built in 1859 but not arrive until 1860, being shipped around the horn to San Francisco then by rail to Portland. The total cost, including shipping, and insurance would be \$1,509.91. Incredibly, it is still owned by Portland Fire today. It would serve until 1883 when horses would begin pulling fire apparatus. It was sold to the Pendleton Fire Department and served there for over a decade. The Veteran Volunteer Fireman's Association of Portland (Volunteers whose jobs were replaced by paid firefighters in 1883) would raise funds through the early 1890s buy back the Jeffers and return it to Portland. It exists today in Portland Fire's collection, including its original paint.

Portland would buy two more hand pumpers, another Smith in 1862 and a Button & Blake in 1865. No



photos have been found of either. This would end the hand pumper era for Portland. One exception would be found. In 1873, when Tiger Engine Company #5 would begin service, they did so with a newly purchased Smith hand pumper. No photo has been found. Tiger would receive a steamer a few years following. Pictured is the 1859 Jeffers hand pumper, in the 1940s and today.



What About Ladder Trucks?

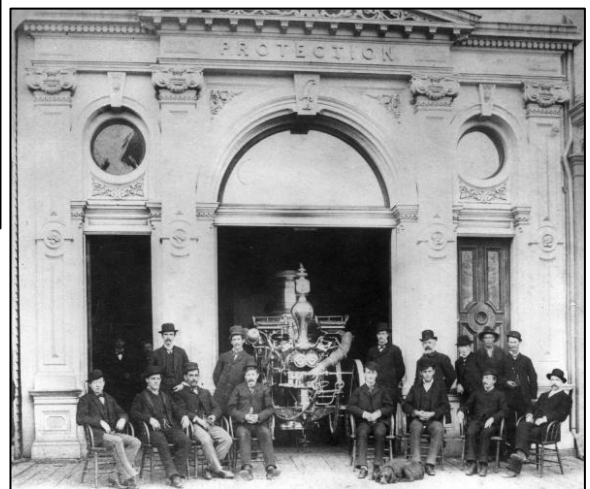
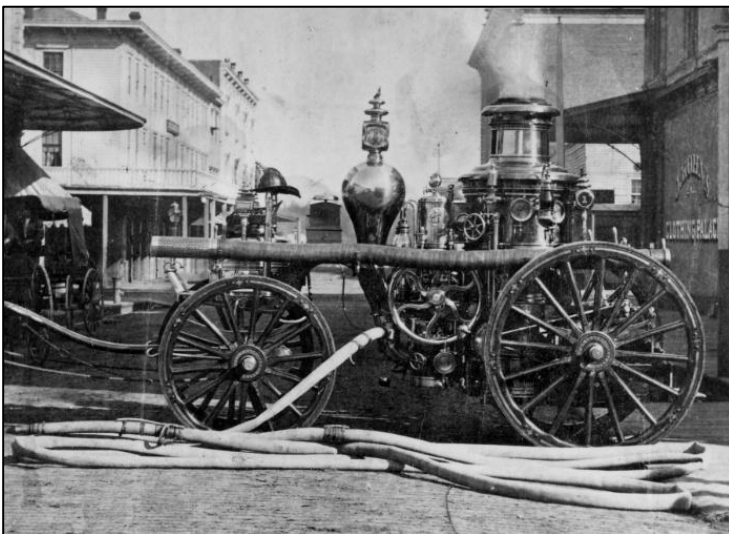
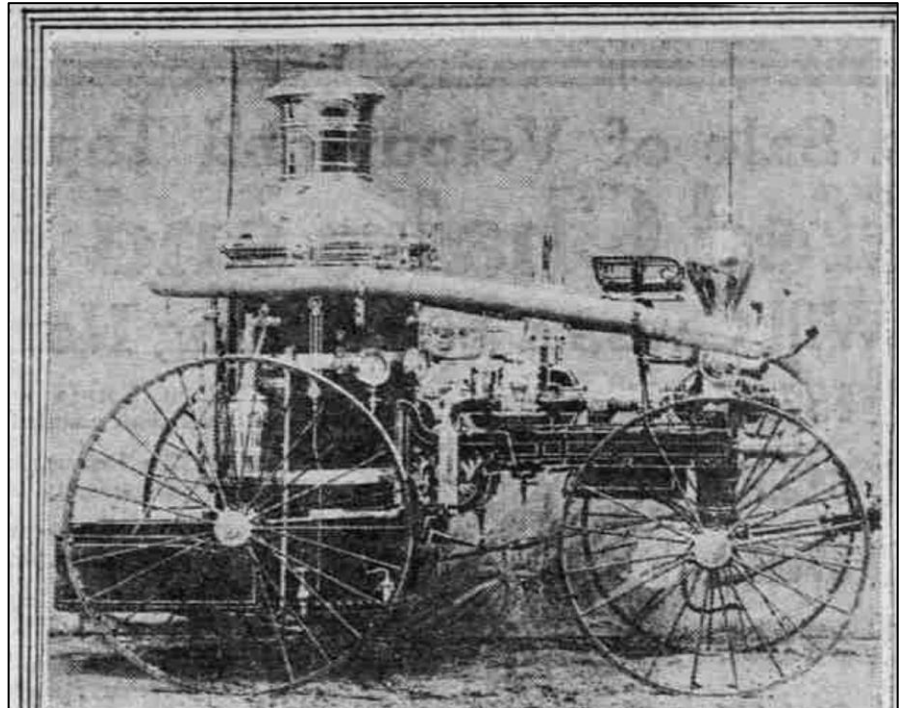
While Vigilance Hook and Ladder was the first fire company to serve Portland beginning on August 2, 1853, history was silent on what kind of apparatus they used. It wasn't until years after they began service that city documents would describe their apparatus. In fact, it would be an 1895 *Oregonian Newspaper* article, doing a retrospective on the first few decades of Portland Fire's service that would describe Vigilance's first apparatus as "a common wagon." In other words, they simply found an available wagon and piled ladders on it to move them from the firehouse to the fire scene. No photos have been found of this vehicle. In 1865, the City of Portland would contract a local company to create a purpose-built ladder wagon (hand pulled) for Vigilance. It would be completed in August 1865. Remarkably, Portland Fire still owns it today and it is a familiar vehicle to any Portland Firefighter. In 2019, it was refurbished by the members of Station 14 and stands as an incredible example of Portland's firefighting history.



Steam Pumps Take Over

Steam powered fire pumps were becoming common technology by the time Portland Fire was able to purchase their first. This would occur in March of 1866. Horses were still 17 years away from being purchased by the City of Portland, so fire apparatus continued to be hand pulled. Steamers likely weighed between 2,000 and 3,000 pounds, so getting these vehicles to the fire scene through the dirt (or mud) streets of Portland remained a job for any available community members. Pictured is the 1866 Silsby Steamer 3rd Class steamer purchased in 1866. It was assigned to Multnomah Engine Company #2.

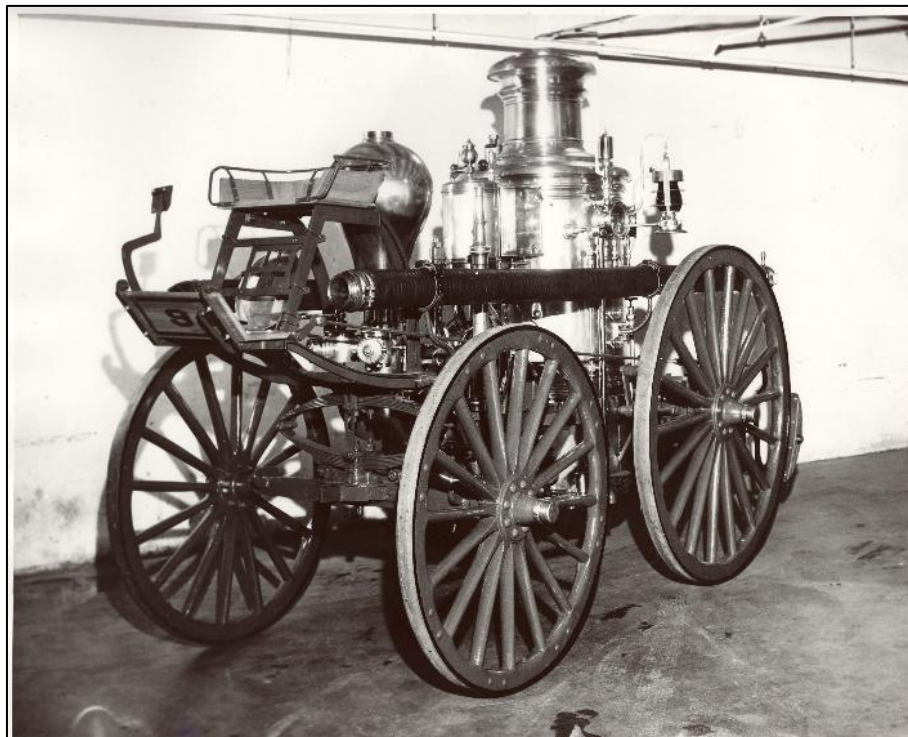
Two more Silsby's would be purchased, one in 1867 and another in 1873. Pictured is the 1867 Silsby assigned to Protection Engine Company #4, poised for service in their station. The other photo is the 1873 Silsby operating at a fire scene.



From Silsby Steamers to Amoskeag Steamers

There were many manufacturers of steam fire apparatus in the mid to late 1800s. It's hard to say what process Portland Fire used to decide which manufacturer to buy from. After buying three Silsby Steamers between 1866 and 1873, Portland would shift to Amoskeag Steamers. Two would be purchased in 1874 and another in 1879. Still hand-pulled, these vehicles remained heavy and cumbersome to move. Amoskeag Steamers were a bit more compact than others though. Pictured below is an 1874 model drafting from the river (Willamette Engine Company #1) and the 1879 model (Tiger Engine Company #5).

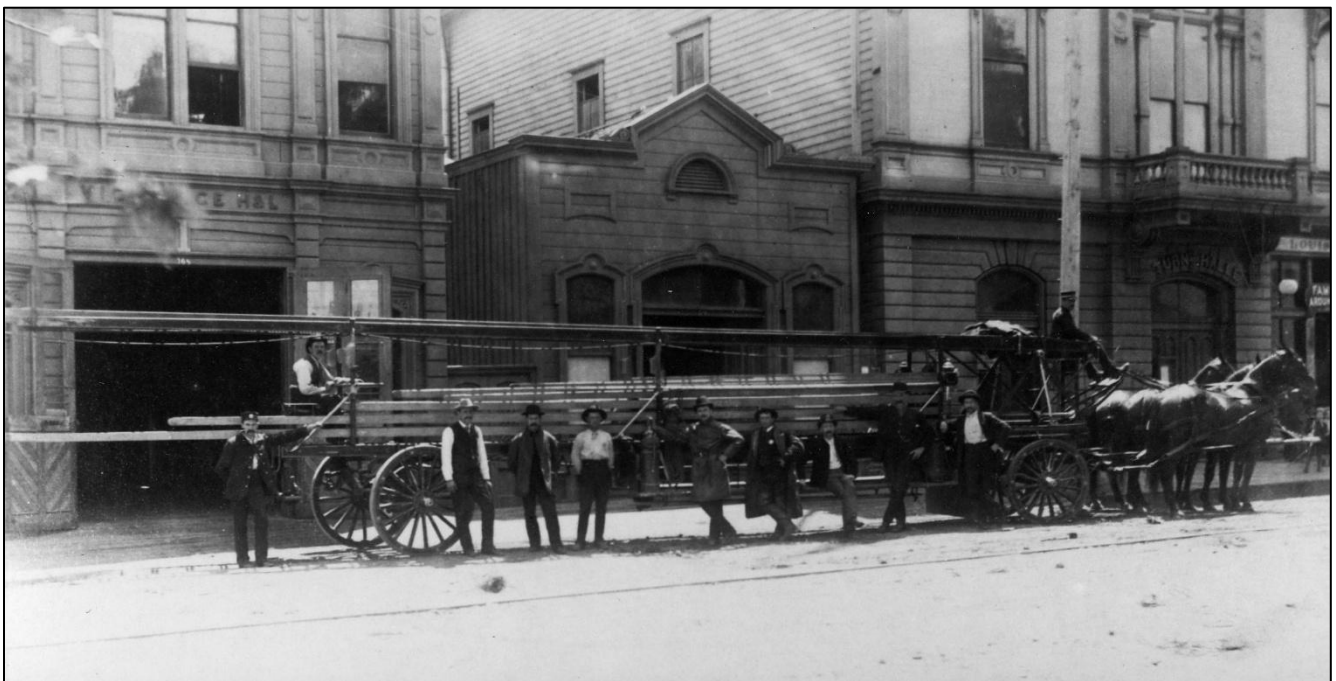
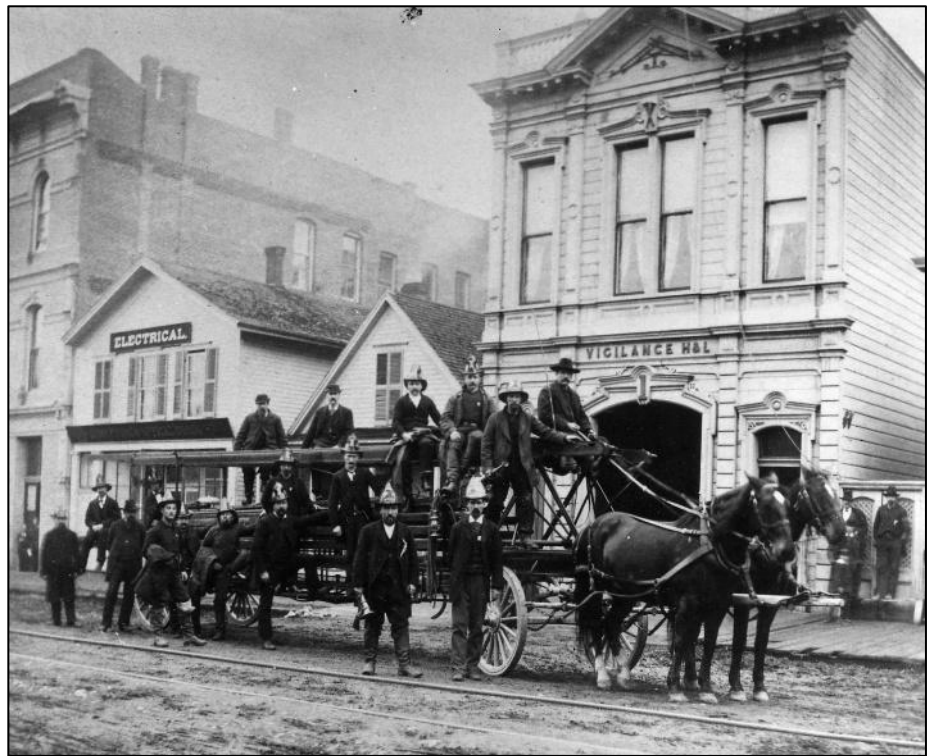
Note the 1879 Amoskeag is considerably smaller than the 1874 version. The latter is a 4th class, meaning it had a much smaller pumping capacity than the 1874 that was a 2nd class. To look closely at the 1879, you will find a number "9" under the footboard at the front. This is because this vehicle continued service beyond 1883 when Portland Fire became a paid fire department. It was modified to be horse-drawn and was assigned as Engine 9. It served in what is now known as the Belmont Firehouse. It sits there today and is decorated with a Tiger Engine Company #5 leather helmet (it was originally assigned as Tiger Engine #5).



Horse Drawn Ladder Trucks

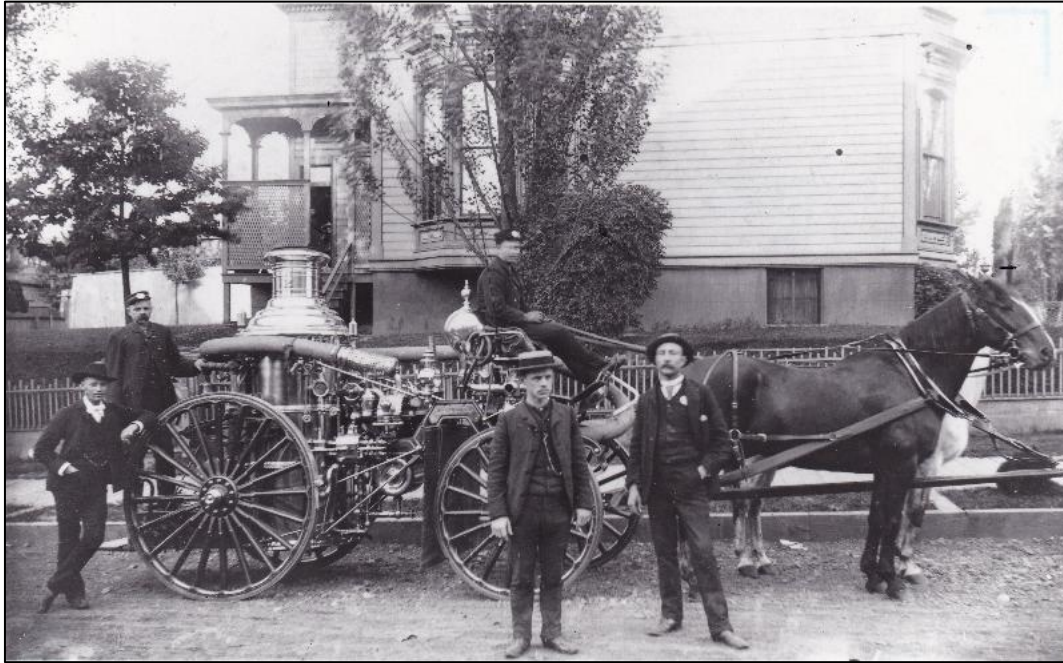
While horses would not be provided by the City of Portland until 1883, some volunteer fire companies apparently provided horses by other means. In 1880, Vigilance Hook and Ladder received (purchased by the City) a Hayes 2nd Class Ladder Truck set up to be drawn by horses. It would replace the hand pulled 1865 ladder wagon. Pictured is the Hayes Ladder Truck rigged with a three horse team. It is unknown how long the ladder is, but it is likely about 65 feet long and spring-loaded to raise automatically when released.

The next ladder truck would be purchased in 1888, also a Hayes, but this time a 1st class. The length of the ladder is unknown but comparing the photos shows it to be considerably longer than the 2nd class. The vehicle also required a tillerman to steer the rear of the vehicle. By 1888, all apparatus were horse-drawn.



Back to Silsby Steamers

Between the purchase of the two Hayes Ladder Trucks came the shift back to Silsby Steamers. In 1882 and 1884, two Silsby Steamers were purchased, both 4th class. While no photos are available of the 1884 version, the 1882 version is pictured here. Close examination of the photo shows the name “Multnomah” on a plate on the side of the apparatus. A manufacturer plate from the side was photographed and on file as well.



Other Manufacturers of Steam Fire Apparatus

In 1890, apparatus records show three Clapp & Jones steamers coming to the inventory. While nothing is stated, it is likely that they came to Portland when East Portland (a different city at the time) was annexed into the City of Portland. As was typical with Portland, the equipment, only after annexation, would be listed in the inventory and be listed by the date service began in Portland. It is unknown when East Portland may have purchased them. One of the three is believed to still exist and was purchased from Portland by the Junction City (OR) Fire Department. It is on display at their central fire station, as shown here. The manufacturer plate matches the inventory number in Portland Fire apparatus records. One other odd manufacturer would follow the Clapp & Jones steamers. A Waterous Steamer is shown in the inventory for 1892. This may have been from the Albina Volunteer Fire Department, which also annexed into Portland around that same time. The Waterous is the lower photo.



More Ladder Trucks

By 1892, Portland was growing and apparently ladder companies were needed. Trucks 3, 4, and 5 were put into service and three Hayes 3rd Class ladder trucks were purchased to serve the need. Pictured are Truck 3, 4, and 5.



What About Hose Wagons?

Steam engines and ladder trucks were visually spectacular when operating and garnered all the attention. But quietly serving alongside every steam engine was a Hose Wagon. Because of the weight of the steamers, equipment carried on them was kept to a minimum, placing less strain on the horses. Ladders, tools, hose, and all the firefighters were carried on hose wagons. Every steamer was accompanied by a hose wagon, but very few hose wagons survived time. Most likely, they were easily converted to other uses when retired from fire department service.

One Portland hose wagon managed to survive. Hose Company #8's wagon was built sometime between 1891 and 1903. Located at 2600 block of N. Borthwick, Engine 8, Hose 8, and Truck 5 all shared quarters.

Manufactured by the May Company, most of Portland's hose wagons had a unique design, making them easy to spot in old photos. Ladders were carried on the beam down the middle of the wagon, causing the two members riding in the seat (drivers) to have the ladder between them. Also, the brass railing along the side of the wagon bed would terminate on the tailboard with a looping, beaver tail-like shape.

Hose #8 ended up in the Reno, Nevada based Harrah's Car Museum. It is unknown how many years it was at their facility. Likely, around 1959, it was sold to Nevada's Ponderosa Ranch, the location that would play host to the TV show Bonanza. It would be used during the 14 seasons Bonanza was on television. The wagon was modified to resemble a typical western buckboard wagon. After westerns lost their popularity, it likely sat unused. In 2015, it was bought at auction by a man named Dave Hubert. Dave owned a Reno



Fire Department steam pumper and wanted a hose wagon to accompany it in parades and other public events. He bought Hose #8 with all the accessories (which had been kept) to restore it to its original condition. When stripping off the paint, he uncovered a logo with the letters PPFD and the number 8. After doing a little research, he realized this was the symbol for Portland Paid Fire Department. Photos of the PPFD logo, when compared to other Portland hose wagon photos, confirmed that this was Hose #8. Dave documented the origins of the wagon it even though he modified it to resemble a Reno Fire Department hose wagon. That's the story of how Hose #8 remains in existence today.

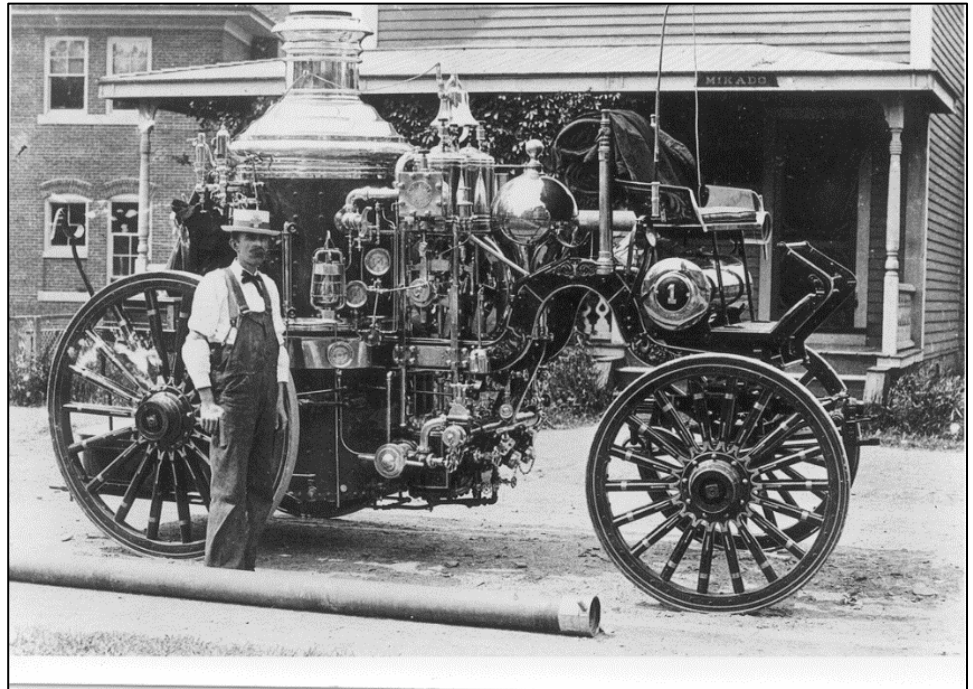


American LaFrance Steam Pumpers Take Over.

By 1901, Portland was a growing city and so was the fire department. Portland Fire had not bought a new fire engine since 1884 (four steamers were inherited from East Portland Fire Department when East Portland was annexed). Over the next ten years, 14 American LaFrance horse-drawn steamers of various sizes would be purchased. This buying spree began with a 1901 Extra 1st class steamer, followed by two more (1902 and 1904). These were large pumps capable of pumping 1,100 gallons of water per minute. The 1901 is pictured here when it served as Engine 1. The 1902 would be assigned as Engine 3. No photos exist of the 1904.

Both the 1901 and 1902 would get a new lease on life when the motorized era came to be (more on that later). All of the other American LaFrance steamers would be 2nd or 3rd class and be relatively similar. The purchasing of American LaFrance would be as follows:

- 1906 – 1
- 1907 – 4
- 1908 – 4
- 1909 – 1
- 1911 – 2



Of the two American LaFrance 3rd Class steamers purchased in 1911, one remains in Portland Fire ownership. It was restored in the 1970s-80s by Al Carocci and Frank Maas. It was an impeccable restoration, and it remains a treasured piece of Portland Fire's collection of historic apparatus.

It should also be noted that the first Fireboat, the George H. Williams, went into service in 1904. It was steam powered, so technically not motorized, but a unique steam-powered apparatus, nonetheless.

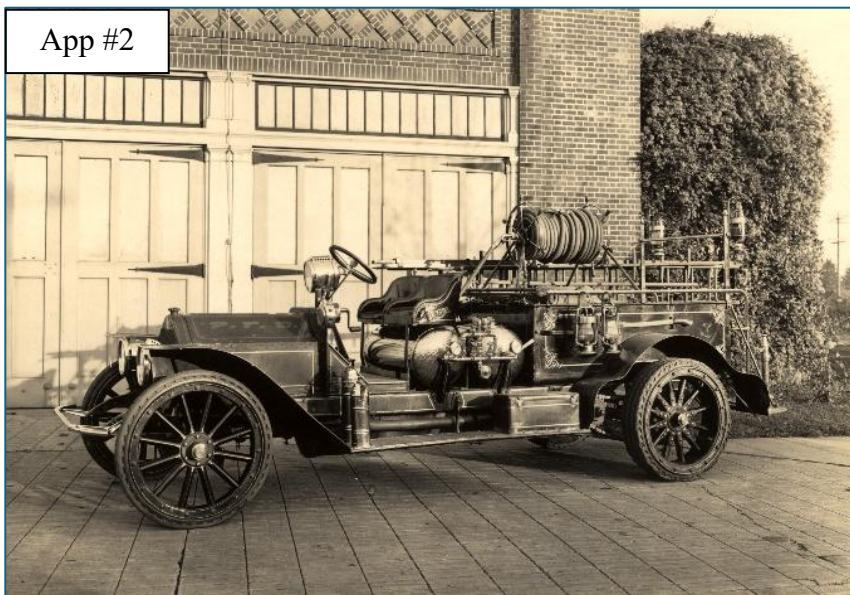


The First Motorized Apparatus

Technically, the first motorized apparatus was David Campbell's Chief's car. It was a 1909 Pierce Arrow sedan. Campbell believed the future of the fire service would rely on motorized fire apparatus. To prove his point, he purchased the Pierce Arrow. With Thomas Gavin, his driver, by his side, Campbell repeatedly proved he could beat horse drawn apparatus to the scene and take less manpower to manage the vehicle than what was required for horses. When Portland Fire made their 1911 order for two American LaFrance steamers, the order was coupled with the purchase of two American LaFrance motorized pumpers. This would begin a new era of firefighting equipment.



From the purchase of the first two motorized pumpers, the apparatus maintenance section of Portland Fire would assign each motorized apparatus an "Apparatus Number." This would be the identity of the vehicle for the entirety of its service life, regardless of where it was assigned as a fire company. To that end, the first motorized fire apparatus, Apparatus #1 and #2, were 1911 American LaFrance pumpers (each costing \$5,380).



Apparatus #1 would be assigned as Engine 6 and Apparatus #2 would become Engine 13.

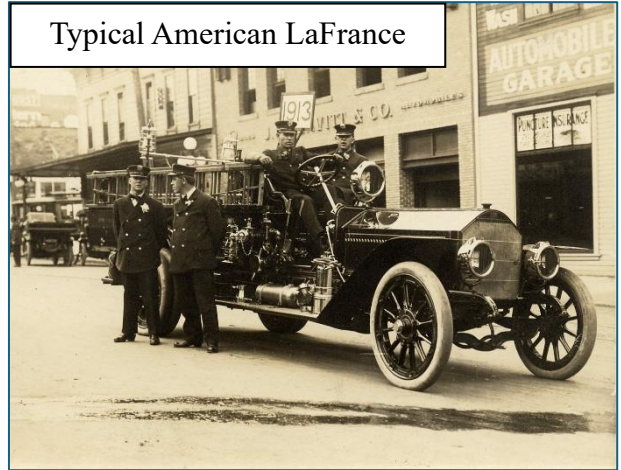
Pictured is Apparatus #1, later assigned as Engine 9. Also pictured is Apparatus #2, later assigned as Engine 24.

Boosting the Fleet

In 1913, Portland Fire would purchase 14 apparatus. This purchasing would include the Fireboat David Campbell (steam powered), a Vellie hose tender, a Federal Service Truck for Fire Alarm Telegraph, one American LaFrance 85' ladder truck, 10 American LaFrance fire engines, and 2 Pope Hartford fire engines.

A typical 1913 American LaFrance is pictured as well as one of the two Pope Hartford's (Apparatus #8 or #14). Only two Pope Hartford's were ever purchased and may have been part of an annexation. The American LaFrance ladder truck (Apparatus #13) was Portland's first motorized truck and the first electric fire apparatus. A gasoline engine powered an electrical generator. The electric generator powered an electric motor on each of the four wheels. This eliminated the need for a long driveline. Even though it was a one-piece vehicle, it utilized a tillerman to steer the rear axle.

Typical American LaFrance



App #8 or #14



App #13

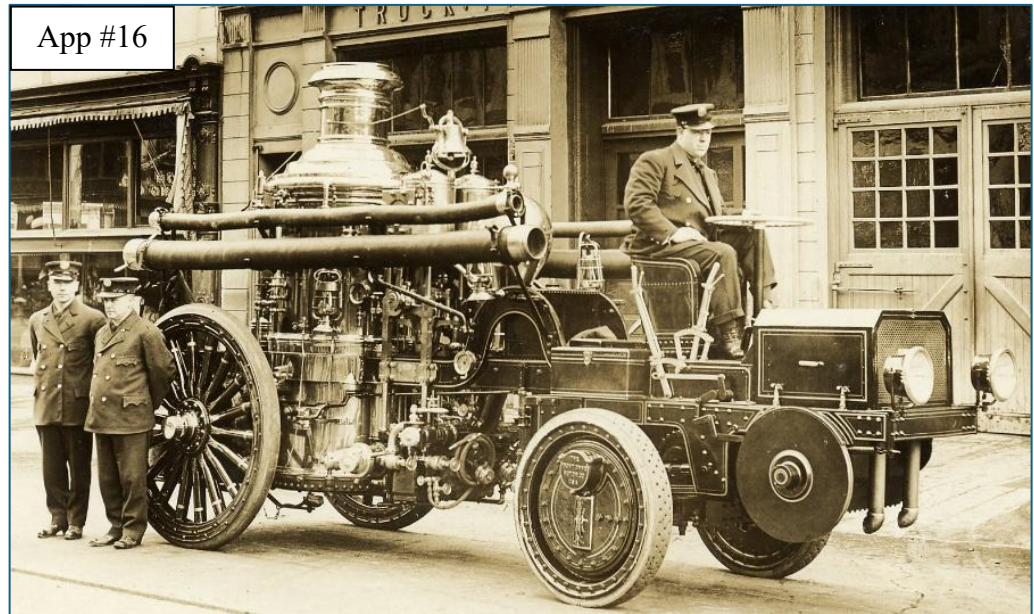


What's Old Is New Again

In 1914, horses were on the way out (Portland Fire would be fully motorized in April 1920). In what was likely a cost saving measure, one of the three American LaFrance Extra 1st class steamers was repowered, shifting from horse-drawn to motorized. Some apparatus manufacturers built front wheel drive, motorized tractors that would replace the front axle of a horse-drawn steamer. Once welded into place, the tractor would now drive the vehicle, allowing more years of service from the pump half of the vehicle.

It was in 1914 when Portland Fire would purchase a Christie tractor and a connect it to the body of the American LaFrance Extra 1st Class steamer, dubbing it Apparatus #16 (formerly steamer number 2967).

In 1917, Portland would take steamer number 2791 and do the same thing, but this time with an American LaFrance tractor. It would become Apparatus #26.



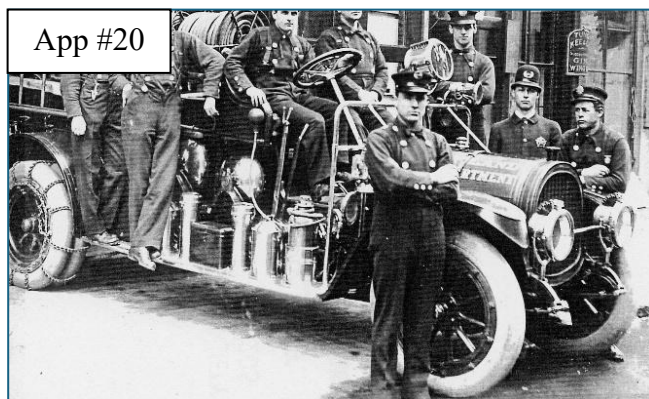
That unique vehicle is owned by the Oregon Fire Museum and on display in Brooks, Oregon. Note the difference in the front end of the Christie vs. the American LaFrance tractor. The Christie is much quite square, while the American LaFrance more resembles the hood and radiator of other American LaFrance apparatus of the era.

Becoming Fully Motorized (1914 to 1921)

Between 1914 and 1921, Portland Fire would purchase many vehicles, moving forward to become fully motorized in April 1920. These purchases would include:

- Fire Engines – 19
 - Gary – 5
 - American LaFrance Engines – 11
 - White – 2
 - Seldon – 1 (acquired through annexation of St. Johns)
- Fire Trucks - 3
 - Seagrave City Service Truck - 1
 - American LaFrance Truck – 2
- Misc. - 6
 - Gary Hose Tender – 1
 - White Supply Truck – 1
 - White Tanker – 1
 - Ford Hydrant Service Truck – 1
 - Previously Mentioned Tractor Conversions for Extra 1st class steamers - 2

A typical American LaFrance fire engine of that time is shown below (Apparatus #33, still owned by Portland Fire). Also shown is a Gary Fire Engine.



Apparatus #36 is the only one known to have been photographed. By coincidence, it is shown here assigned as Engine 36. Apparatus #20, a White fire engine, is also pictured. It carried a different look than other manufacturers. Apparatus #21 was also unique. It was a City Service Truck (Ladder Truck with no aerial ladder). It is Seagrave and shown here assigned as Truck 6.



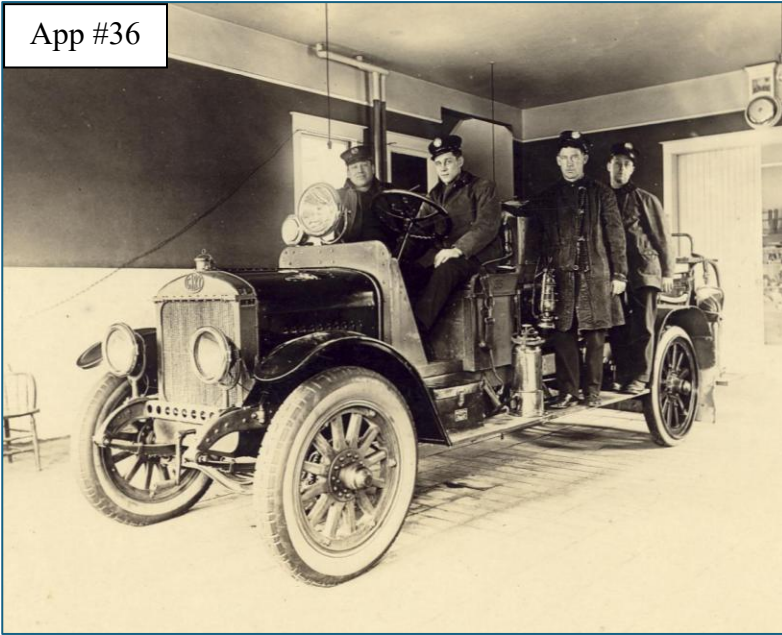
What the Heck is a Gary? (1919)

On September 21, 1919, an Oregonian newspaper article announced, "Gary Trucks Accepted." It went on to say that six Gary fire engines were selected, beating out seven other manufacturers in a competition for Portland Fires' business. These would replace horse-drawn vehicles as Portland was transitioning to motorized (Portland would become fully motorized in April 1920). The Gary trucks featured a 1 ½ ton suspension, pneumatic tires in the front and solid rubber tires on the rear, and able to move at 35 miles

per hour. One truck was supposed to be a hook & ladder (records show five becoming pumpers) and one hose tender. These would become Apparatus 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, and 40. Pictured is Apparatus #36 serving as Engine 27 at 2 NE 82nd Avenue, the only one found in a photograph.

It's also notable to recall that the second platoon of firefighters would begin work on November 1, 1919, nearly doubling the work force. This was a time of great change for Portland Fire.

App #36



App #36 as Engine 27



Apparatus From 1921 to 1927

The city of Portland would continue to grow and so would the fire department. Between 1921 and 1927, Portland Fire would continue to expand the fleet. During this time, 15 more pieces of equipment were purchased. They would include:

- Fire Engines – 8
 - Gary – 1
 - Stutz – 1
 - American LaFrance – 6
- Fire Trucks – 3
 - Seagrave City Service Truck – 1
 - American LaFrance 85' – 1
 - Ahrens Fox 75' Tiller – 1
- Misc. – 2
 - Studebaker Squad – 1
 - Oldsmobile Fire Alarm Telegraph Service - 1
- Fireboats – 3
 - The Fireboat David Campbell, Karl Gunster, Mike Laudenklos (first gasoline powered)

Pictured is Apparatus #51, owned locally (in retirement) at one time and beautifully restored. It is typical of the 1924 American LaFrance design of that time. Also pictured is Apparatus #56 (1927 Studebaker), the first purpose-built squad vehicle. Also shown is Apparatus #55, an Ahrens Fox 85' tillered ladder truck.



1927 Was A Big Year

Not all apparatus drove on land. In 1927, a major purchase would add three new fireboats to the fleet. The “Marine Program” began on February 27, 1904 when the first fireboat, the George H. Williams, was christened on the banks of the Willamette River. On January 26, 1913, the first fireboat David Campbell would join the fleet. Both boats were steam powered and very labor intensive to operate.

A major designer of Portland Fire Stations, Chief Lee Holden would also assist in designing these three fireboats slated to join the fleet. The “Campbell Class” fireboats, as they would come to be known, would make their debut on November 12, 1927 (Campbell), November 23, 1927 (Laudenklos), and December 10, 1927 (Gunster). The Campbell and Gunster were named for notable members who died in service to Portlanders. Assistant Chief Mike Laudenklos would die of a long illness for which he was awaiting surgery. Pneumonia would claim his life on April 18, 1923. His body of work that spanned 38 years earned him a place of honor (naming of a fireboat) that only six Portland Firefighters would ever achieve. He is one of two members who had a fireboat named for them that did not die of a service connected death (the other is Vernon Buss).

The three fireboats would each stretch 87 feet 6 inches long and cost \$103,615 each. They would

originally be equipped with engines from a company called Sterling. In late 1961, each would be refitted with Hall Scott engines and have an aerial ladder added. The Campbell and Gunster would go on to receive diesel engines but the Laudenklos was not noted to have had that change. In 1978, the Laudenklos would be sold from city service and finally receive diesel engines in its new life as a tug boat. The Gunster would be sold and scrapped that

Fireboat Mike Laudenklos



same year. The David Campbell would go on to serve until June 30, 2021 when it was officially retired. In June of 2026, it would be delivered to the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon with a future as a land-based exhibit. The David Campbell remains the longest serving apparatus in Portland Fire history at 93.5 years of service. Pictured is the Mike Laudenklos pre-1961 and the David Campbell near the time of its retirement.

Fireboat David Campbell



Something Happened in 1928

By 1928, Portland Fire had purchased 56 apparatus of various types. The majority were fire engines and fire trucks, but a variety of service vehicles and a few other apparatus came in from annexations. Of the 56 apparatus, 32 were American LaFrance. American LaFrance would make up almost 75% of the emergency response apparatus fleet. Interestingly, between 1928 and 1998, only 4 American LaFrance apparatus would be added to the fleet. One came in 1928, likely ordered in 1927. Two came as part of annexations to the city, therefore the fire department fleet. Only one would be purchased, a 1950 American LaFrance 100-foot tillered ladder truck. This was a very curious finding. Further investigation found that on March 21, 1928, Edward Grenfell would be appointed Fire Chief. He would serve as Chief for 29 years until his retirement on June 30, 1957. The total of his career was 52 ½ years. Could it be that he did not like American LaFrance? Some news reports hinted at problems with the quality of American LaFrance by 1928. The local dealership, Walter Long, felt the quality of American LaFrance was suffering and was changing their business practice to sell Ahrens Fox, which the Fire Bureau did purchase in 1928. Portland Fire would go on to purchase 6 Ahrens Fox apparatus, two in 1927 and four in 1928. Over the next 40 years, manufacturers would include Mack (6), Federal (4), Fageol (6), Kenworth (10), Maxim (4), and an assortment of others. By 1957, about 133 apparatus had been purchased, most of which were emergency response apparatus. Pictured is Apparatus #39 as Truck 3, the only American LaFrance purchase by Portland Fire over a 40-year period.



The Fantastic Fageol's (1938)

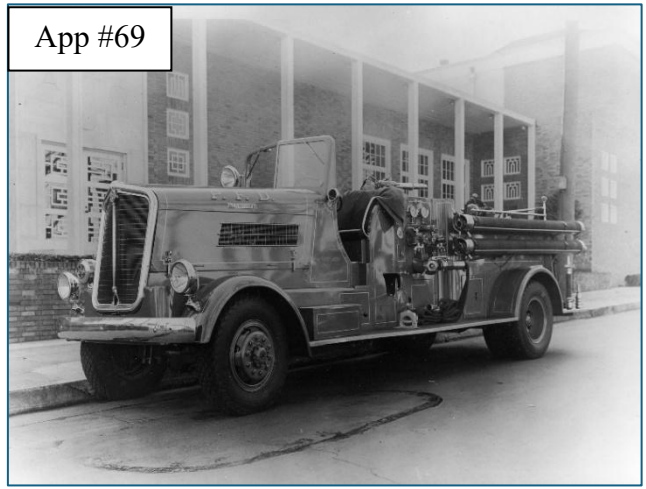
By the 1930s, Portland was beginning to buy apparatus in batches. There seemed to be no favor for a particular manufacturer, it was likely driven by low bid. In 1938, five Fageol fire engines would be purchased. These apparatus were well regarded and one (Apparatus #65) would be converted to a Manifold and have an extended service life because of it.

In this same year, four Kenworth apparatus would be purchased alongside the Fageols. It is suspected that Fageol could not meet the size of the order, so Kenworth's fire engines were added to it. Photos show Closer examination shows Apparatus #66 (1938 Fageol) and Apparatus #69 (1938 Kenworth). It appears they might have shared similar specifications on order. The other Kenworth ordered at this time was the Jay Stevens Disaster Car (Apparatus #77), which was a rescue-ish vehicle that was purchased outside of the Portland Fire purchasing protocol, being paid for by Aaron Frank.

App #66



App #69



App #77



Kenworth Takes Over (1938-39 and 1951-52)

Now that Portland Fire had dabbled in Kenworth apparatus in 1938 and 1939, they became a more serious buyer in 1951. Between late 1951 and early 1952, five Kenworth fire engines would be added to the fleet. These were large vehicles, more resembling an over-the-road truck cab. They were equipped with four-wheel drive and be assigned to some of the more hilly areas of Portland. Pictured in color is Apparatus #82 serving as Engine 16 on NW Yeon Street. In black and white is Apparatus #86 when serving as Engine 3, parked along Tom McCall Waterfront Park.

App #82



App #86



The Behemoth Era (1951-1953)

Maxim, International, FWD, and Reo were other manufacturers of fire engines that came and went in single-batch purchases. They were part of the “behemoth era,” when fire engines were very large vehicles incorporating large hoods in the front. Between 1951 and 1953, Portland would purchase one Reo, two FWDs, two Internationals, and four Maxims. Pictured is Apparatus #73 (1951 FWD), Apparatus #90 (1952 Maxim), and Apparatus #76 (1953 International). No photos are available for Apparatus #38 (1951 Reo).

App #73



App #90



App #76



The Modernization Program – A Seagrave's Best Friend (1958)

In July of 1956, then Deputy Chief Simpson was instructed to initiate a careful study of the city's fire protection requirements and make recommendations for operating economies and modernization within the Fire Bureau. Chief Simpson assigned five teams of fire officers to make separate staff studies of Portland's fire station distribution in relation to present and anticipated protection needs. All were instructed to use the principles set forth in Municipal Fire Administration (International City Manager's publication) and use the requirements of the National Board of Fire Underwriters as criteria for the study. Each staff study group, working independently, produced strikingly similar solutions.

The modernization plan, in addition to station relocation, included a program for the replacement of obsolete tools, equipment, fire apparatus, a major overhaul of all three fireboats, and refurbishing the alarm system.

It was concluded to be most practical and economical to borrow capital to finance the modernization program. A \$3,000,000 Fire Bureau Facilities and Equipment bond measure was prepared to be submitted to the voters of Portland. The proposed expenditures were to be allocated generally as follows:

- \$1,500,000 for the construction and relocation of 13 new fire stations and the remodeling of 3 others. Twenty-two old and poorly located stations were thereafter abandoned, leaving a total of 31 stations, which would be six less than had been in use at one time with a smaller city.
- \$900,000 for new fire apparatus and equipment and extensive overhauling of Portland's three 33-year-old fireboats.
- \$600,000 for modernizing, refurbishing, and extending the fire alarm system.

As for apparatus specifically, the manufacturer Seagrave would be the big winner. 13 pieces of Seagrave equipment would be purchased, including:

- 4 Ladder Trucks (two 100 foot tillered, one 85 foot front turntable)
- 9 Fire Engines

Also:

- 3 Fire Engines would be rebuilt into Manifold Trucks.
- All three Campbell Class Fireboats would be re-powered, replacing Sterling pump and propulsion engines with Hall Scott engines. Aerial ladders would also be added to the boats, all at the hands of Albina Engine and Machine Works.



While it would take a couple years to make all the apparatus purchases, it would eventually be completed. The photos show Apparatus #20 as Engine 26, Apparatus #26 as Truck 40, and Apparatus #37 as Truck

5. The final photo shows most of the Seagrave Engines and Trucks lined up in front of Station 1. These rigs would prove to be durable and long lasting. Some were repowered with diesel engines and would be kept in service for 25+ years. The photo of multiple apparatus was the better part of the new fleet, proudly displayed in front of Station 1.



Fire Trucks Incorporated??!! (1975)

In 1975, seven fire engines made by “Fire Trucks Incorporated” or “FTI” were purchased in another one-batch-only buy. These would prove popular, drivable, and lasted for many years. All were identical, and all suffered from a propensity to rust in the storage compartments. Most would serve about 20 years before being retired. Pictured is Apparatus #63 serving as Engine 8 and Apparatus #66 serving as Engine 21.



Western States and the 80s

By 1974, Portland Fire would begin an alliance with Western States, a fire apparatus manufacturer in Gaston, Oregon. They would build fire apparatus using a commercially produced Spartan Cab/Chassis. Portland would purchase fourteen Western States apparatus over the 15 year period between 1974 and 1989. They served in many parts of town and two were purchased as “Quads,” being equipped with a ladder rack and full complement of ground ladders. Pictured are Apparatus #74 serving as Quad 23 and Apparatus #49 serving as Engine 26.



Somebody Must Like Spartan Cabs/Chassis (1990 to 1996)

In 1990, the Spartan cabs would continue but a company called Marion would provide a batch of 6 Portland Fire engines. Apparatus #87 to #92 would be relatively identical. In the photo below, Superintendent of Apparatus Bill Powell is posed in front of all 6. Each would cost \$167,968.00. In 1992, Spartan cabs would continue but a shift back to Western States would produce 3 more fire engines (Apparatus #21 to #23). Another batch of 3 fire engines made by a company called 3D would also utilize Spartan Cabs (Apparatus #26, #27, and #29). Then, in 1996, 5 additional fire engines would be purchased, again with Spartan Cabs, but now manufactured by H&W Emergency Vehicles (Apparatus #12, #14, #15, #16, and #18). In between, four ladder trucks would be purchased, all using Spartan Cabs but with LTI (Ladder Trucks Incorporated) as the manufacturer (Apparatus #32 to #35). Pictured is Apparatus #89 as Engine 3, Apparatus #26 as Engine 40, and Apparatus #33 as Truck 3, and Apparatus #32 as Truck 2.



App #89



App #26



App #33



App #32



Bill Powell with Marion Fleet

American LaFrance Makes a Comeback (1998 to 2007)

After a long hiatus as a preferred apparatus, American LaFrance would come back to Portland Fire in 1998. 18 fire engines (Apparatus #19, #20, #24, #25, #28, #30, #31, #40, #41, #42, #60, #61, #64, #65, #66, #68, #93, #94) would be purchased over the ten year time period from 1998 to 2007. Two ladder trucks (Apparatus #36 to #38) and a heavy rescue assigned to Squad 1 (Apparatus #44) would also be purchased. These would all carry a distinctive look that was a departure from previous fire apparatus. Pictured is Apparatus #20 as Engine 19, Apparatus #37 as Truck 7, and Apparatus #39 as Truck 2.

App #20



App #37



App #39



It's All About Pierce (2005 to Now)

While Portland Fire continued to purchase American LaFrance through 2007, the first Pierce Apparatus would go into service in 2005. Four specialty vehicles would be purchased that consisted of two CBRNE Special Rescue Units (Chemical, Biological, Radioactive, Nuclear, and Explosive - Apparatus #93 and #101), one USAR Van (Urban Search And Rescue – Apparatus #104), and one Hazardous Materials Van (Apparatus #102). Collectively, this purchase alone would cost \$1,584,692.00. Another specialty vehicle would be purchased from Pierce one year later, a Communications Van (Apparatus #103) for a cost of \$900,263.00.

This was only the beginning. To date (2026), the purchases from Pierce include 31 fire engines, 8 fire trucks, 3 Quints, 2 heavy rescues, 2 rehab/lighting apparatus, and 2 tankers. These 48 apparatus cost over \$35 million.

Pictured is Apparatus #101 as CBRNE 18, Apparatus #119 as Truck 2, and Apparatus #144 as Engine 14.

App #101



App #119



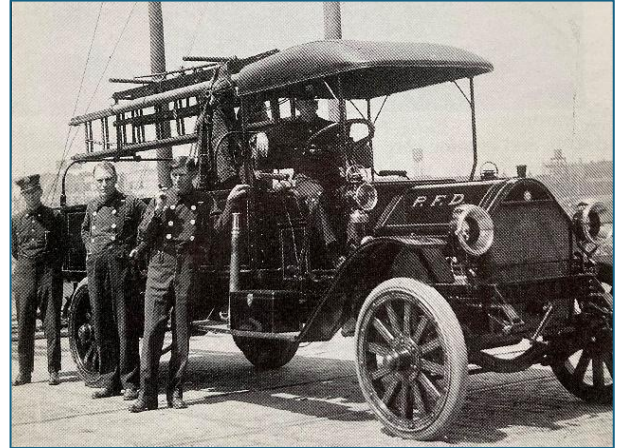
App #144



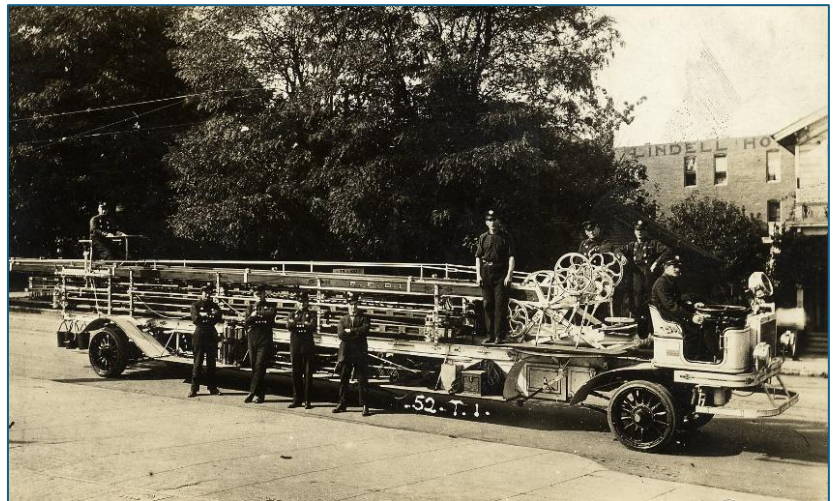
Interesting One-Off Portland Fire Apparatus

Having covered the major purchases of Portland Fire Apparatus over the past 170+ years, now let's consider some of the unique apparatus that were one-off's. Many of these are well known, but their stories may not be.

Apparatus #15 – 1913 Velie – A Velie was not technically a fire apparatus but more a truck company producing commercial chassis that could be adapted to any number of applications. In this case, Apparatus #15 (the 15th motorized apparatus purchased by Portland) was a hose tender for the Fireboat David Campbell. The first Fireboat David Campbell was a steam powered boat, launched in 1913. It was 125 feet long and required a crew of eight, although efforts were made to carry a crew of less, which didn't go well. Pictured is Apparatus #15 as Hose Tender 2.



Apparatus #13 – 1913 American LaFrance – The first motorized Truck was purchased in 1913 and assigned to Truck 1. It carried an 85-foot ladder with a front turntable mechanism. While it was a one-piece apparatus, it utilized a tillerman to steer the rear wheels. But that isn't what was most unique about it. Apparatus #13 was the first electric fire apparatus. It was powered by a gasoline engine that drove an electric generator. The generator powered the electric motors mounted on each wheel. There would only be one truck like this ever owned by Portland so it may have been an idea that wasn't quite ready for mass production.



Apparatus #48 – 1921 Stutz – In the early 1900s, the Stutz Motor Car Company was quite well known for making automobiles. In 1920, Harry C. Stutz founded a branch of Stutz called the Stutz Fire Engine Company. It lasted until 1929 when it closed. In 1930, it reformed as the "New Stutz Fire Engine Company." During the initial run between 1920 and 1929, Stutz Fire Engines were sold across the US and in Japan. A scattering of Stutz fire engines were purchased by fire departments around the Pacific Northwest. In 1921, Portland would purchase one for \$13,000. But that was it, no others would ever grace Portland's fleet. It would serve as Engine 1, Engine 9, and Engine 13 (perhaps other places too). It's unknown how long it lasted before being retired. No photographs of it have ever been found.

Apparatus #56 – 1927 Studebaker – Portland Fire envisioned the first Squad unit in 1925. The first run at this was through the conversion of Apparatus #4 (a 1913 American LaFrance fire engine) into a squad vehicle. A squad was intended to carry one officer and five firefighters and respond primarily to medical emergencies or as a manpower pool for larger incidents. The idea must have caught on because in 1927, Portland Fire purchased a purpose-built squad vehicle to replace the converted American LaFrance fire engine. It would be painted white with a red cross on the grill. It would be dubbed Squad 1 and serve for 26 years before the vehicle was retired in 1953. However, in the meantime, other vehicles would serve as medical apparatus to further Portland's evolution into the emergency medical response business. Pictured below is Apparatus #56, the 1927 Studebaker Squad, the only Studebaker ever purchased.



Apparatus #8 – 1932 Lincoln Sedan – By 1932, Portland Fire's commitment to emergency medical response had grown. A Lincoln sedan was purchased by Portland Fire to be used as an emergency medical response vehicle. It would be put under the charge of Captain Fred Willford Roberts (not to be confused with Fred Wells Roberts, Fire Investigator and Fire Marshal). Captain Roberts would receive special training in first aid and resuscitation. While the George Baker Emergency Car (named for the Portland Mayor) would go into service on June 30, 1933, it would almost immediately be sent on a tour of the State of Oregon to demonstrate the concept to fire departments across Oregon. Upon its return, it would respond to 325 to 350 various medical calls each year. Pictured is Apparatus #8, the George Baker Emergency Car.



Apparatus #77 – The 1939 Jay Stevens Disaster Car – The Jay Stevens Disaster Service Unit (also known as the Jay Stevens Emergency Car) was a well-known vehicle that served various purposes over the course of its service. It was purchased for Portland Fire by mercantile king Aaron Frank, son of one of the founders of the department store chain Meier and Frank. Mr. Frank, a gifted amateur mechanic, had been favorably impressed by the 1933 George Baker Emergency Car, but he envisioned a greater, even gargantuan, version of that ambulance – a “colossus of mercy” that could face down any emergency. The result of his scheming was a modified bus christened the “Jay W. Stevens Disaster Service Unit” in honor of a friend and Portland’s first Fire Marshal. It was publicly unveiled on March 25, 1939. For his gift, then Fire Chief Edward Grenfell would make Aaron Frank an “Honorary Fire Chief.” The Stevens Car would serve until May 9, 1972, having logged over 48,000 miles. Its service included use as a mobile hospital, rescue unit, and command/communications vehicle. The Kenworth model T-26 still exists today and sits in the back of an Indiana Truck Museum awaiting restoration. Pictured is Apparatus #77. Notice the change in the nose from one photo to the other. This modification was made when an engine transplant occurred somewhere during its service.



Apparatus #41 – 1962 GMC –As was shared previously, the Squad concept began in 1925 with a converted 1913 fire engine to create the first Squad vehicle. In 1927, a Studebaker Squad would be purchased, purpose built for the work. The Squad concept carried forward in one form or another for the next 35 years. In 1962, Portland would purchase another purpose-built vehicle to serve as Squad 1. It was a GMC box vehicle with a special box on the back and additions like an A-Frame winch and other specialized “heavy rescue” tools. Originally red, it would most notably be painted lime green (only a couple other Portland apparatus would ever wear that color). It was a staple at Station 1 until 1989 when a Mack Squad would replace it. Of note was that Apparatus #41 was the first diesel powered apparatus in Portland’s fleet. Apparatus #41 serving as Squad 1 is pictured.



Apparatus #2 – 1968 Osh Kosh – In the early 1980s, Portland Fire would decide that an airport crash truck might be a useful vehicle for mutual aid responses to Portland International Airport or where firefighting foam would be useful. A 1968 Osh Kosh Crash Apparatus was acquired and put into service. It was kept for several years before vanishing with little fanfare. Apparatus #2 as Foam Turret 28 is pictured.



Portland Fire's Historic Fleet (pictured in previous chapters)

1859 Jeffers Hand Pumper – The Jeffers Side Stroke Hand Pump Fire Engine is a unique piece of equipment built by William Jeffers of Rhode Island. He was the great, great grandfather of a Portland-based ATF Fire Investigator named John Comrey (who provided the depth of history on Jeffers). The vehicle was innovative by its pumping arms (brakes) on the sides of the vehicle. Previous designs had brakes on the front and back. Jeffers wasn't just a builder of fire engines, but he was also a member of Rhode Island Engine Company #1 in the 1840s. As a craftsman, Jeffers got his start as a casket maker. If you take a careful look at the Jeffers hand pumper, you'll see his early influences in the water box.

1865 Ladder Truck – This vehicle is Portland's first, purpose-built ladder wagon. Before this, Vigilance Hook and Ladder used a "common wagon," as historic counts describe it. Over the course of 1865, the city of Portland contracted a local company to build this vehicle. Whether it was created from scratch, or from a kit is unknown. Newspaper reports would say it was completed in August of 1865. It would serve until the horse drawn era arrived in 1883 and apparently be stored away for many decades, surviving until today. It was recently restored by the members of Engine 14 and is likely enjoying its best condition since the day it was built.

1879 Amoskeag Steamer – This vehicle was manufactured by the Manchester Automotive Works in Manchester, New Hampshire. It was designed as a hand-pulled vehicle, later adapted to horses. As a class 4 pumper (260 gallons per minute pump), it was smaller than most but likely still a handful to move around. It rests in the Historic Belmont Firehouse today, which is fitting because it once served as Engine 9 (a "9" is carved into the bottom of the footboard in front of the seat). It was restored around 1960 and remains in great condition today.

1911 American LaFrance Steamer – Even though David Campbell purchased his Chief's car in 1909, the true transition from horse to motorized apparatus came in 1911. Portland purchased 4 apparatus that year, two American LaFrance Steamers and two American LaFrance Motorized fire engines (Apparatus #1 and #2). This 1911 steamer, still owned by Portland Fire, was one of the steamers purchased that year. For whatever reason, it remained in the possession of the city for all these years, sometimes being shown on loan to the Portland Water Bureau. At some point, it was "returned" to Portland Fire but apparently without a plan. It was placed in the basement of Station 1, and a wall was built around it to keep it out of harms way. It was discovered in the late 1970s and Firefighters Al Carocci and Frank Maas would take on the task of restoring it to better-than-new condition. It remains the most beautifully restored apparatus in Portland's fleet today.

1918 American LaFrance Motorized Fire Engine (Apparatus #33) – This vehicle stands today as perhaps the most original conditioned piece of historic equipment in Portland's historic fleet. Purchased in 1918 as the 33rd piece of motorized equipment Portland would purchase; it served for 10-15 years before going into reserve status. World War II brought on cold war concerns and volunteer efforts were mobilized to form a Civil Defense Corp. This vehicle was assigned to that work, giving it a longer than usual service life, but with little wear and tear. In 1952, after 34 years of service, it would be sold at public auction. It was purchased for \$295 by a man named Don Letson of St. Johns. When Don arrived home, he realized many original bits of equipment for the rig were missing. He wrote the Fire Chief

(Edward Grenfell) and asked if he could buy them. Chief Grenfell explained that city ordinance restricted such sales. However, Grenfell offered various pieces on an “indefinite loan” status, with the provision that the equipment be returned in the event of a “national emergency.” Letson often displayed the fire engine in parades and other public events. He cherished the fire engine until the end of his life in 2011. In 2012, his family would donate the vehicle to Portland Fire, thus returning an incredibly original piece of equipment to its original buyer.

1949 Mack Fire Engine (Apparatus #17) – This vehicle is probably the most known, used, and iconic apparatus in Portland’s historic fleet. It was purchased in 1949 but originally configured as a quad apparatus, meaning it had a ladder rack to carry additional ladders in a rack that lifted up and over the hose bed. This was part of a pair (also Apparatus #40) of Mack’s purchased in this configuration. A Seagrave quad would be purchased in 1954. The quad idea would make a comeback in 1974 and be revisited periodically after. The Mack remains in service today, continuing to lead parades and other auxiliary services as an ambassador to Portland Fire’s heritage.

#END#

www.PortlandFireHistory.com