

*This article is notable because it precedes the formation of the Fire Prevention Division of Portland Fire by less than a year and is likely a major factor in the formation of that Division.*

*On April 18, 1914, the Fire Prevention Division of the Portland Fire Department would be created and led by Jay Stevens as the city's first Fire Marshal*

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## Organization and Business Methods of The City Government of Portland, Oregon

An excerpt from the "Report by Bureau of Municipal Research New York City"

### **Introduction**

At the invitation of Mr. C. S. Jackson, Editor of the Portland Journal, a meeting of some fifty citizens of the City of Portland was held at the Commercial Club on the evening of March 11, 1913, for the purpose of listening to an address by William H. Allen, Director of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research, upon the work of that Bureau as conducted in other cities throughout the United States. As a result of this meeting, the following committee was appointed by Richard W. Montague, then presiding, to inquire as to the feasibility of organizing a permanent Bureau of Municipal Research in this city: W. B. AYER, JAMES B. KERR, C. S. JACKSON, A. FELDENHEIMER, A. H. DEVERS, KINGMAN BREWSTER. Subsequently, Richard W. Montague and Charles D. Mahaffie were elected members of this committee. On March 22, 1913, the Bureau of Municipal Research of New York City was engaged by this committee to make a preliminary survey of the organization and business methods of Portland's City Government. Their report follows.

### **BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH**

261 Broadway, New York Portland, Oregon,  
May 5, 1913.

Mr. Kingman Brewster, Secretary, Committee of Municipal Research, Portland, Oregon.

Dear Sir:

In accordance with your instructions, the New York Bureau of Municipal Research has made a general survey of the organization and business methods of the city government of Portland. As reports on the several departments have been completed, we have submitted them to the chairman of your committee for approval, after which they have been released for publication from day to day in the local press, beginning April 13. We beg to hand you herewith a complete set of these reports. In order that the full value of this survey may be realized, a continuity of effort is essential. A local Bureau of Municipal Research should be organized to continue the constructive work along the lines laid down herein.

Very respectfully,

*NEW YORK BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH*

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

One of the most popular present day slogans is fire prevention. "One ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is the keynote of the modern efficient fire department. The best way to fight fires is to prevent them.

Portland has good firefighting equipment but is doing practically nothing on prevention, with the exception of making a monthly inspection. School children have been instructed how to "pull a box," but if they were informed how to prevent fires more good would accrue than by knowing how to turn in the alarm after the fire has started.

A comprehensive campaign should be launched for fire prevention. The importance of such a campaign is emphasized, for example, by the following facts based on the department's 1911 report. There were 936 fires from known causes during the year, and they were attributed to 74 different causes. However, an analysis shows that 570 of the fires, or over 60 per cent, were caused in only 12 different ways, all of which may be classed as preventable. They were as follows:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. Burning flues        | 285 |
| 2. Defective flues      | 28  |
| 3. Sparks               | 83  |
| 4. Electric wires       | 25  |
| 5. Burning grass        | 32  |
| 6. Burning grease       | 15  |
| 7. Burning brush        | 23  |
| 8. Cigars               | 16  |
| 9. Bonfires             | 15  |
| 10. Over-heated stove   | 22  |
| 11. Over-heated furnace | 10  |
| 12. Matches             | 16  |
| Total                   | 570 |

The place to start such a campaign is in the schools for there not only is the child (the coming citizen) instructed but the parents of that child as well. The press would undoubtedly give such a movement plenty of publicity.

One way of carrying out such a campaign would be to issue monthly statements of the causes of fire with the relative increase or decrease in number of the previous months of the year and the same month of the year preceding; also showing the percentage of decrease or increase. Excellent results would obtain if the chief were to frequently visit the schools (in assembly or classes) and give talks on fire prevention in the home; show the children how to operate a signal box; also hold a fire drill.

It is essential that the large downtown business buildings be thoroughly familiar to all officers of the department. For this reason, they should be taken through the buildings in groups say twice a year, so

that if they were called upon to combat a conflagration in the business district they would already be familiar with the interior arrangement of the buildings.

### **Lack of Financial Accounting**

The only accounting record kept in the fire department is in memorandum form, by station houses. It is only a record of bills rendered and as small stores are kept separately and not charged out to the different houses, the purpose of the memorandum is defeated. All requisitions for supplies pass through the central office, but no record of them is kept. They are merely filed. Purchase requisitions are not set up as a liability when issued. In fact, there is no liability accounting.

No stores ledger is kept for small stores. Although job cost cards are provided to show material and labor cost of repairs, they are not operated so as to be of real value. The master mechanic sends in a detailed monthly statement of work done, with both material and labor cost, but it is arranged in such a way that the total labor cost does not have to balance with the payroll for the repair shop. With a little different arrangement this could be done very easily.

Equipment service cards are provided but they also are not properly kept. It cannot be determined how much one engine has cost for repairs in a given time as compared with another. This information is important in buying new equipment. Now that the department has started in buying automobiles, detailed equipment and repair records should be kept.

Although members of the department are physically examined upon admission to the department, no subsequent physical examination is made, and while the entrance age is 21 to 35 there is no limit to the serviceable 14 age. This is largely due to the fact that the department has no pension system. A card catalogue of members is kept at headquarters upon which are recorded the sustained charges of each individual, but no record is kept of efficient service nor is continued service, efficiency or meritorious bravery rewarded. Some system of stripe or star designation for efficiency should be devised to stimulate good esprit de corps.

### **Need New House**

Engine House No. 6 is almost dilapidated and in a very bad location. The horses must run a half block on an improvised wooden runway built on the sidewalk before reaching the street, and then make a hairpin turn in order to go to fires in the mill section. As the city owns a lot within two blocks of this building, a new building should be built there.

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