

# The Legacy of Fire Chief Lee Gray Holden

Compiled by Don Porth

Of the thousands of men and women who have served with Portland Fire, most are relatively unknown. There are those that distinguish themselves through actions, both heroic and tragic. Some will leave a legacy that quietly remains in place long after the member has left Portland Fire, and this earth.

One such member is Lee Gray Holden. Rising from firefighter to the rank of Chief, Lee Holden left a legacy of fire stations that have lasted a century, and continue to have purpose.

Lee Holden was born December 30, 1865 in Cairo, Illinois. In 1885, he moved to Portland, Oregon. He would marry Minna Margaret Lang on June 29, 1887. Less than two months later, on August 8, 1887, Lee would join the East Portland Fire Department. He would be assigned to Grant Engine Company #2, located on East 7th Avenue between Harrison and Stephens Streets (1917 SE 7th Avenue). He would make Captain on October 14, 1891.

It was about the time Lee made Captain that East Portland Fire Department merged with the Portland Paid Fire Department. He would serve as Captain of Hose 3 (1917 SE 7th Avenue) until he was "discharged" on July 31, 1896. There is no explanation in his personnel file as to what "discharged" meant. Lee would be reappointed as Battalion Chief on July 5, 1898, under Fire Chief David Campbell. Lee would "resign" on February 1, 1908, again without explanation. He would be reinstated three years later, on December 15, 1911, just a few months after the line of duty death of Chief Campbell. Lee would become Assistant Chief under Fire Chief John Young on April 23, 1923 and then become Fire Chief on June 30, 1923 when Young would leave office.

It was the period of time after Lee's 1911 reinstatement that earmarks his most notable contributions. Lee was called upon to design a new era of fire stations that would move Portland Fire from the horse drawn era into the motorized era, and beyond. While architectural firms would create the drawings, Lee's design work ensured that a generation of fire stations would meet the needs for Portland Fire's crews and equipment.

Lee would create two basic designs. These will be referred to as the Bungalow and the Two-Story. However, he designed two other stations that are completely unique, each serving strategically at both the north and south ends of Portland.

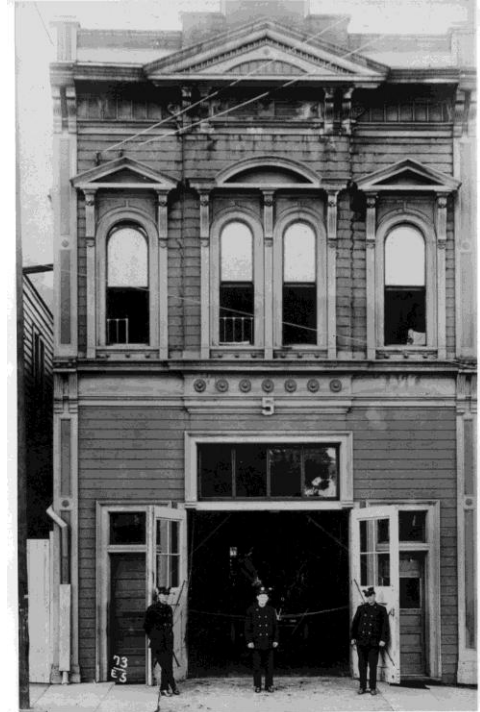


In 1911, Station 24 was built at 1126 Patton Avenue. Today we know that as 5340 N. Interstate Avenue. The sprawling station house was grand in appearance and spacious inside. It was likely intended as district headquarters, serving the north end of town.

In 1912, Station 25 was built at 1000 Francis Avenue. Today's address is 3350 SE Francis Street. It has many similarities to Station 24, but utilizes a different style brick on the exterior. It was likely intended to be a district headquarters, serving the south end of town.

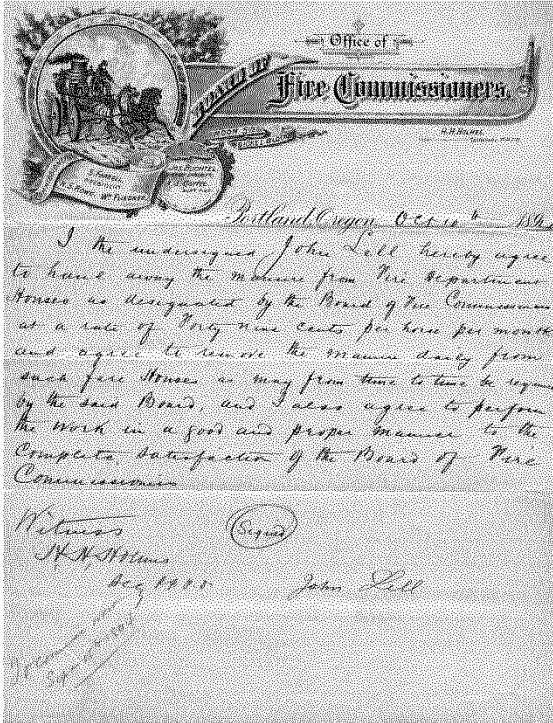
From this point forward, Lee's two designs, the Bungalow and the Two-Story, would dominate the station design for over four decades. Of the 25 stations Lee designed, six remain in service with Portland Fire & Rescue (as of 2023), twelve still exist in private ownership, and only seven have been lost to deterioration or progress.

The Two Story station design was really an extension of previous station designs. Pictured is Station 5, built in 1890 with the typical two story design. The primary difference between Holden's design and the previous version's is that every station Lee designed was built with a non-combustible exterior finish (brick or stucco). This was likely a feature meant to protect fire stations in great conflagrations like "Black Saturday," Portland's conflagration of August 2, 1873, that destroyed 22 square blocks of the city.



The main floor of Lee's Two-Story design was built with large doors, high ceilings, and typically wooden floors, later replaced with concrete. The main floor would be dedicated to horses and equipment. The high ceilings allowed harnessing to hang from the ceiling in readiness for the emergency. Horses spent time in their stalls, which had spring loaded gates allowing them to open automatically when the telegraph message alerted the station of a fire. When the gates released, the

horses quickly moved into place in front of their assigned apparatus. The horses would stand under the harnessing until the firefighter would lower it onto their backs.



The balance of the main floor was reserved for feed, hay (hay lofts were also available), and a manure room. Manure disposal was one of the more significant costs associated with the horse drawn era. Pictured is an 1894 contract for manure removal from all fire stations at a rate of \$0.49 per horse per month. Portland Fire may have had 50 or more horses at that time.

The upper floor of the Two-Story was the living area for the firefighters. It was not insulated from the main floor. Open stairways and pole holes allowed the station to ventilate from the main floor, with air flowing up and out the skylights in the roof. The upper floor consisted of a living room, locker room, and dormitory. Officers usually had a separate room/office. These areas were generally nicely furnished and trimmed with woodwork.

The Two-Story stations were not equipped with kitchens. These stations required firefighters to either dine at a nearby restaurant or to take time to go home for a meal. Prior to 1919, Portland Firefighters worked 7 days per week with 12 hours off per week (24 hours off per week from 1908 to 1919). Kitchens were later added to the Two-Story fire stations.

The first Two-Story station of Holden's design would be built in 1912. It is not clear which was completed first, Station 2 at 510 NW 3rd Avenue or Station 9 at 900 SE 35th Avenue. Photos of all Two-Story designed stations will be found at the end of this article.

The Bungalow fire station was an innovation that began in 1913. When the affluent Irvington neighborhood was being developed, a fire station was needed. After meeting with citizens, it was clear to Portland Fire officials that the typical Two-Story design was too "commercial" looking for the intended character of the neighborhood. A new design was needed. Holden went to work and developed what would become known as the Bungalow.

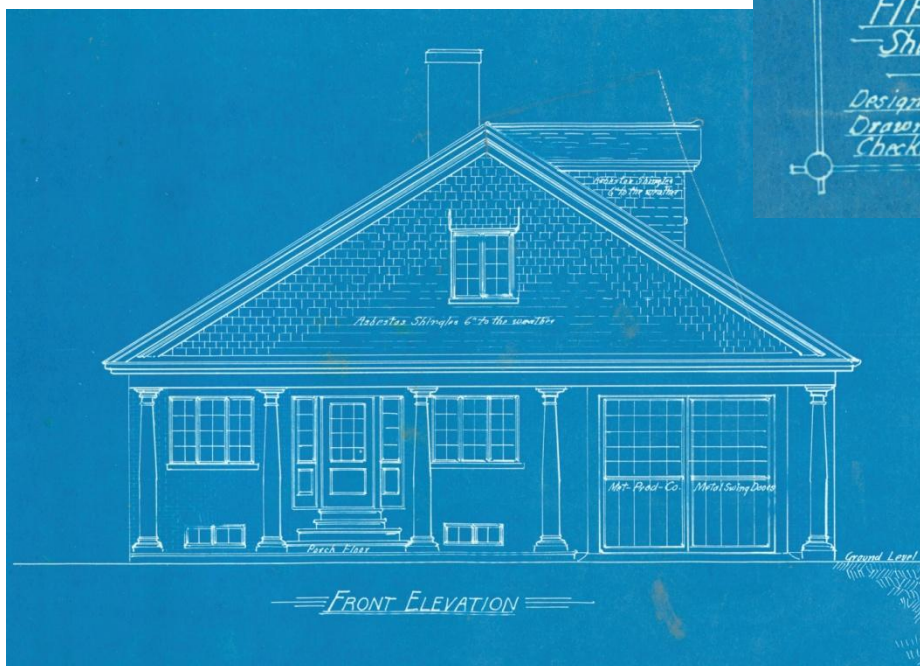
The Bungalow looked very much like a craftsman-styled home. It boasted a front porch, tall pitched roof, and many residential features including flower boxes under the front windows. So how could this function as a fire station?

The hose drying tower, necessary for hanging wet hose to dry, has always been a staple among fire stations. Being as much as 30 feet tall, the hose tower was difficult to hide. Lee cleverly concealed it within the building, having the top terminate in a dormer under the steeply pitched roof, and having the lower end extend into a pit below the basement floor.

Apparatus doors were also a challenge to make neighborhood friendly. Lee would create two swinging doors, which met in the middle. They would be equipped with windows typical of the front of a house, complete with flower boxes underneath the window exterior, and curtains on the interior of the windows. When closed, it was difficult to tell they concealed a full sized fire apparatus. The only clue would be the concrete drive leading to it. The Bungalow fire stations were built with kitchens, living rooms, and a basement for a variety of activities. Large attic spaces were found under the steep roof, which were sometimes developed into useable space. They also included locker rooms and dormitories.

The first motorized fire apparatus were purchased in 1911. Needing much less space than a horse drawn apparatus (no need for horse stalls, hay lofts, and overhead harnessing), the Bungalow was more compact. But in 1913, when Station 18, the first Bungalow station would open, Portland Fire was seven years away from all horse drawn equipment being put out to pasture. The Irvington Station was committing Portland Fire to motorized fire apparatus moving forward.

Pictured are blue prints from Station 18, which opened in 1913.



The second Bungalow station would not be built until 1921, a year after Portland Fire had become fully motorized. The Bungalow would go on to be the only fire station design used for the next 11 stations built.

In all, Lee Holden's fire stations would consist of 10

Two-Story's, 13 Bungalows, and the 2 other stations (Station 24 and 25). The build of these 25 stations would span 1911 to 1928. As of 2023, 3 Bungalows and 2 Two-Story's remain as operating stations for Portland Fire. Eighteen of the Holden designed stations remain in existence, the others being in private ownership. All stations will be pictured below.

Along with his accomplishments in fire station design, Lee championed the idea of a "Squad" apparatus that would respond to emergencies and provide specialized rescue services as well as first aid service. In 1925, Apparatus 4, an American LaFrance pumper serving as Engine 15 was converted into the first Squad 1.

In 1927, the year Lee would retire, the first purpose built Squad was purchased. Apparatus 56 was a Studebaker apparatus, painted white, that would begin a tradition of special rescue vehicles that still exists today.

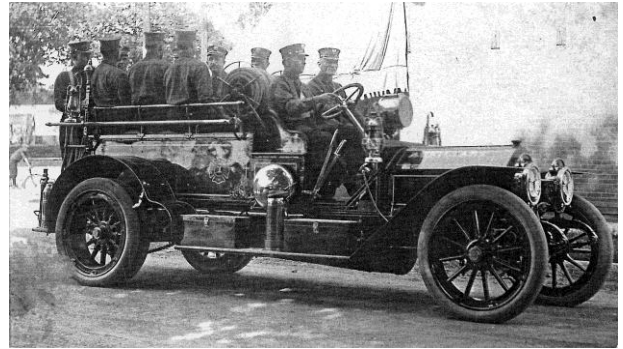
Lee did not stop at land-based apparatus. Lee designed three fireboats that would be christened in

1927 - The Mike Laudenklos, the Karl Gunster, and the David Campbell. These fireboats featured a low design, allowing them to pass under draw bridges on the Willamette without the need to wait for a bridge lift. The David Campbell would go on to serve for 94 years, being retired in July 2021.

Lee Holden would complete his fire service career on December 31, 1927. His wife, Minna, had died in 1922 so Lee spent his new found time with the

Masonic Lodge and the Shriners. He would move to Seaside, Oregon in 1939.

At age 77, Lee traveled from Seaside to Portland in June of 1943. His daughter had been involved in a vehicle collision between a city bus and a fire engine. He had stopped



to visit old friends at Fire Station 7 at 1036 SE Stark Street when he suffered a stroke. He was transported to Good Samaritan Hospital where he would succumb to event.

Lee was survived by his son Alex (a Portland Firefighter), and three daughters - Margaret, Helen, and Nellie. He also had ten grandchildren. Lee would be buried in Lone Fir Cemetery in Section 34, Lot 25, Grave 3N.



Built 1911 - Station 24  
5340 N. Interstate Avenue



Built 1912 - Station 25  
3350 SE Francis Street



Built 1912 - Station 2  
510 NW 3rd Avenue



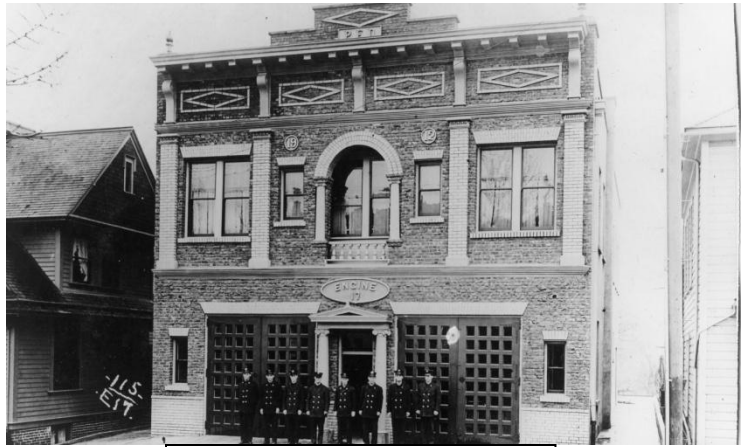
Built 1912 - Station 9  
900 SE 35th Avenue



Built 1913 - Station 18  
2200 NE 24th Avenue - Prototype Bungalow Station



Built 1925 - Station 3  
1425 NW Glisan Street



Built 1913 - Station 17  
824 NW 24th Avenue



Built 1913 - Station 23  
1917 SE 7th Avenue



Built 1913 - Station 27  
2 NE 82nd Avenue



Built 1913 - Station 28  
5540 NE Sandy Boulevard



Built 1913 - Station 29  
6823 NE Durham Avenue



Built 1913 - Station 30  
8105 N Brandon Avenue



Built 1913 - Station 4  
1724 SW 4th Avenue



Built 1921 - Station 20  
8210 SE 13th Avenue



Built 1924 - Station 5  
3323 SW Front Avenue



Built 1924 - Station 6  
2401 NW 23rd Avenue



Built 1924 - Station 12  
203 NE 28th Avenue

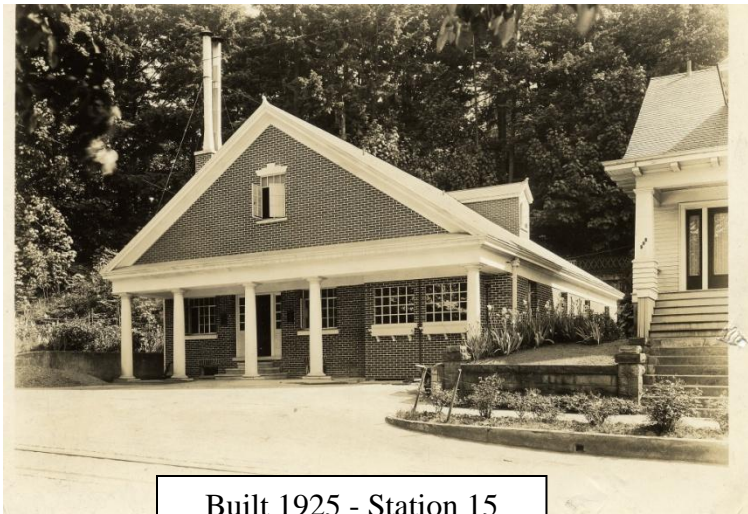




Built 1924 - Station 14  
4867 NE Union Avenue



Built 1925 - Station 10  
5830 S Kelly Street



Built 1925 - Station 15  
1920 SW Spring Street



Built 1927 - Station 31  
4530 SE 67th Avenue



Built 1928 - Station 11  
5905 SE 43rd Avenue



Built 1928 - Station 34  
4828 NE 33rd Avenue



Built 1928 - Station 36  
5247 N Lombard Street



Built 1928 - Station 37  
5707 SE 92nd Avenue

#END#

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