

# Oregonian Feature Story

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By De Witt Harry

"Avoid precedent" has almost become an axiom in these super modern times when men pride themselves on originating, but emulation is an incalculable spur in the accomplishment of lasting deeds. In this respect, Portland is extremely fortunate in having a fire department whose members have failed in time of need.

Examples innumerable exist in the annals of the city firefighters of comrades who have fought the last battle wholeheartedly and have given their all in the service which is so exacting. From the immortal Dave Campbell down the list of men whose unsplotted escutcheons adorn the rolls of the "departed while on duty" list of the Portland department inspiration exists that cannot be ignored. In addition to this there is the liberal leaven of old members who preserve vividly for newcomers the legends and duties of the service as handed down from one generation of men to the other.

## Priceless Relics Preserved

Up on Portland Heights in Station 15 are preserved a great number of priceless relics of the brave old days of the Portland force, some of them dating way back to the first times of the organization. The William Jeffers hand pump that came through the isthmus of Panama in 1860 and went into service with old Columbian Engine Company No. 3 at 246 Washington Street is there. This engine, a masterpiece of the mechanical art of those days, is in perfect state of preservation and is lovingly guarded by Captain W.R. Carrington, the oldest man in point of continuous service in the department today and a member of old Protection Engine Company No. 4.

What an eye-opening revelation it would be if some of the old boys who tugged at the ropes in the old days and "manned the brakes and gave way with a will" on old Columbian could return to earth once more and take the old pump out to answer an alarm, instead of Captain Carrington and his rose festival prize winners. What a sight it would be for the sedate residents of the heights could the old alarm bell that lies in the back of the engine house peal out the call and the red flannel shirted boys of old with their hip boots and helmets scurry to answer, shouting echoing instructions through their brass and silver trumpets. Captain Alex Dodge was the first skipper of the Columbian crew with W.B. Clark and Hamilton Boyd as assistants. They had 950 feet of hose and their Jeffers side stroke engine was the crack piece of machinery of its kind in the city. Of the old volunteers who first worked on the engine kept in the heights house none are alive today, though such men as Thomas G. Young, B.F. Goodwin, A.B. Brannan, Adam Zorn, Levi Knott, and Charles Logus have left their mark in the city of today.

## First Engine Has History

Captain Carrington's house seems to be the center of the city for the care of the significant mementos that remain to recall the tale of the development of the city department. All the souvenirs there have great historical value. For instance, the full story of the Jeffers engine would not be complete were it

not state that it went to Pendleton for duty in 1882 after serving its period of usefulness here and after being forced to give way to one of the steamers that came at that time, and that its history was finally completed when it was repurchased a few years ago to be kept as a part of the civic souvenir collection. Also in this house is the first steamer to come to the city, a Silsby rotary engine of the third class that arrived in 1868, which was immediately put into service and which presaged the passing out of the volunteer departments, as the new apparatus became too unmanageable for them. It was all right for men to serve as draught animals when the machines only weighed some 1,400 pounds, but when they began to get into several tons, it was impossible to move them, and the next step was the partial volunteer system when a scattering of full time paid men were stationed in each engine house, the engineer and the drivers of each steamer company, and the rest of the crew composed of residents of the neighborhood who were on a partial-pay plan, answering alarms and getting paid for that in addition to the sum allowed for their being ready at all times. Some of the hand engines were yet in service, but it was soon found that as Portland began to get more than 20,000 population it was much better for them to have a better grade of equipment with the result that the most modern machinery was installed. The main reason for the installation of this grade of firefighting tools on a full paid basis was that the costly apparatus deteriorated rapidly when not getting the proper amount of care, and then it was necessary to have trained horses for the engines and they necessitated the attention of a full crew.

The transition from then on has been gradual. With the great increase in population and wealth of the city, it has been necessary to add to the department and Portland has always been one city in the country that has kept pace with the improvements in this direction. The department of today is far removed from that of the olden days with a double platoon system and full motorized apparatus as well as the fast boats on the river and the up-to-the-minute alarm system. The old city alarm, or town bell, was installed in a tower of the building, now abandoned at Fourth and Yamhill streets, and after that came a siren placed at the Inman Poulsen mill. The first town bell came here in 1858 and weighed 1,040 pounds. It cost the city \$518 and freight and came into use with the first start of the Portland department in 1858, when it was really first recognized. The big town bell with which so many of the Portlanders of today are familiar and that was in the Fourth and Yamhill street tower weighed 4,067 pounds with the striking apparatus and cost the city \$3,000.

### **The Oregonian Leads Fight**

As has been the history of Portland since its inception The Oregonian led in the campaign to obtain for the city an efficient fire department in 1852. At this time Thomas J. Dryer was the editor of the paper and he came out and emphasized the need for adequate protection. As has been usual the paper echoed the sentiment of the city and the formation of a department was but a matter of a short time and it was placed on a firm basis. Tom Dryer showed how the [REDACTED] policy of the city dads hurt.

The story of the famed fire of 1873 that swept most of the city of Portland as it then stood, is a thrilling one, much of the tale being gleaned from information on file in the archives of the Oregon Historical Society. This fire resulted in the installation of heavy steamers in most of the engine companies of the day. The fire started in the early morning and soon reached the proportions of a holocaust as it was fanned by a brisk wind and driver south from its place of start near the St. Charles Hotel. Portland of that day was a city with many flimsy structures, many of the stores being highly inflammable

construction with paper or cloth lined partitions. In previous years there had been a number of costly blazes, but the one of 1873 was mainly memorable for its great spread and the magnificent spirit of help that was shown by the surrounding cities and towns. Vancouver was almost the first to respond and the little steamer Oneatta brought an engine company and 60 men from there in 72 minutes, some time and seldom duplicated by the same route even today.

### **Call Is Made For Help**

By noon of the day of the fire the men of Portland were exhausted and the call went out to the surrounding cities for help. "Send fresh men, ours are exhausted," was the appeal that met with such ready answer. A train went out on the Oregon and California to Salem and that city sent two engines and hose carts and Hubbard and Gervais sent every able bodied man to aid their big sister city. The Oregon City Wollen Mills shut down and W.H. Callicot, a fearless young railroad engineer of those days, sat at the throttle of the pickup train and made the trip from the Willamette Falls metropolis here in 52 1/2 minutes, a record, and shame be it said for Portland, for according to the records of that day he was not even rewarded with a vote of thanks. What a comeback for Oregon City of today in the late discussion that arose over sending of Portland apparatus there to fight their last big fire. When the 1873 fire was finally stopped, it was found that it had completely destroyed the district from Morrison to Jefferson streets along the river and along Madison street as far west as Second street. It was a hard blow to the struggling little city of that day but marked the real inception of rigid fire inspection laws and of a better equipped department.

Charles H. Dodd, who now lives on First street near Grand, is possibly the oldest living fireman in the city. He was a member of the department in the old volunteer days and knows what it means to bend his back over the brakes of the heavy pumps. Out at Tigard lives W.B. Spencer, also one of the old boys, and this couple are the real old-times of the city department. Portland, in common with other cities in the old days of the volunteers, recognized the fact that some little reward out of the ordinary was due these men who did so much for the protection of life and property, and the exempt firemen's list was early established here. This honor, when granted, excused the men from jury duty and from a certain proportion of their personal poll tax. The first men to be so honored in Portland were given a vote of thanks by the city in 1864, and their certificates. On this list are found:

- Willamette Engine Company #1
  - William Beck
  - William McMillan
  - Harry Seymour
  - J.C. Van Renselaer
  - D.W. Burnside
  - Asa Harker
  - F. Harbaugh
  - J. McLaughlin
  - E.J. Northrup
  - Shubrick Norris
  - S.M. "Pill" Smith
- S.D. Smith
- S.S. Slater
- C.M. Wiberg
- J.O. Waterman
- Multnomah Engine Company #2
  - A. Davis
  - Joseph Tucker
  - L.M. Starr
  - T.B. Trevett
  - L.C. Millard
  - S.G. Skidmore
  - J. Seller

- Vigilance Hook and Ladder
  - William Baker
  - T.J. Holmes
  - Frank Dekum
  - C.A. Haas
  - C.L. Kuhn
  -
- M.M. Lucas
- A.D. Fitch
- S.J. McCormick
- Peter Taylor
- Leopold Meyer

### **Ladies Honor Fighters**

Up in Engine 15's house on Spring street today are to be found many of the souvenirs of the old department, relics that will be cared for by the department for the ages to come. In the stand of trophies are fully a dozen trumpets presented to members of the department for their meritorious services in times of danger or in recognition of their bravery. One of the most chaste and showy of these is an elaborately engraved silver megaphone inscribed "to Couch Engine Number 6 by Their Friends at the Catholic Ladies Fair, Dec. 5, 1887." What a proud bunch of boys they must have been when they received this boon from the fair hands of the girls of the city, and what rivalry must have existed to be the fellow to handle the trumpet when the company was in action, or perhaps the foreman insisted that he be given the use of it as one of the prerogatives of his office.

Old helmets, including Jack W. Lyon's first white chief's headpiece, are there, a shield from the Brooklyn volunteers to the Portland volunteers, belts worn by notables of the department, the old tiger shield of No. 5 company, and the stuffed owl that belonged to No. 3, alas, with a wicked and leering eye looming from a moth eaten visage. The hall contains many of the membership rolls of the old companies and presentation books and other souvenirs and is almost hallowed ground for the boys of today, as Dave Campbell's picture adorns the wall along with others of men who have lost their lives while at duty.

### **Boys Want to Be Firemen**

Boys have always found a fascination about an engine house and the lure of the uniform exists even today, though possibly not to such a great extent as it did when each house was peopled by the well-trained horses. The splendid spectacle of the well-trained and faithful animals in action, galloping to a fire, now exists merely in the memories of the past, but each engine house in the city yet has its attendant crowd of hero worshippers who gaze longingly at the brass sliding pole leading down from the sleeping quarters and long to be given a chance to make the slide, feet hooked about the slender surface in a professional attitude.

The story of the earliest days of the department, of some of the pioneers who had a great deal to do with the protection of the little town of Portland over a century ago, is an interesting one, and, fortunately, a fairly comprehensive record exists in the files of The Oregonian and in the documents of the historical society. The first attempt to organize a fire company in Portland was made in the spring of 1851. On May 6 of that year the old Pioneer company was formed. Among the 37 charter members were:

- A.B. Hallock
- J.M. Breck
- George H. Flanders
- A. Robert Thompson
- Dr. R.B. Wilson

This company enjoyed but a transitory existence, for in the annals of this city no record of its existence after 1852 has ever been found.

### **First Fire Occurs**

In 1852 there occurred a small fire during midsummer which awoke the people to the necessity of making arrangements which would insure adequate protection. At that time the mayor of Portland was Josiah Failing. Immediately after the fire referred to, Mr. Failing took prompt steps to obtain the protection which to him seemed necessary, and with the view of effecting a fire organization from which satisfactory results could be expected, he appointed Stephen Coffin, Thomas J. Dryer and I.B. Smith, to act as fire wardens. Nearly two years after the Pioneer company was organized, a call was made to organize a hook and ladder company and to perfect a system which would provide for efficient work by the fire department. This meeting took place on July 28, 1853. A resolution was passed which declared the whole city a district for the organization of the proposed hook and ladder company, and it was the sense of the meeting that Portland should be divided into two sub districts, in each of which should be formed an efficient engine company. The dividing line between the two sub districts was Washington street.

The result of the meeting was the organization of Vigilance Hook and Ladder Company No. 1. The first officers of this company were:

- I.B. Smith - Foreman
- H.W. Davis - Assistant
- C.A. Poor - Secretary
- S.J. McCormick - Treasurer

The company adopted its constitution and bylaws August 1, 1853, and the list of charter members included 36 names. The company was admitted for duty by the city council one day after its organization (on August 2, 1853).

### **Hook and Ladder Formed**

The first headquarters of this company were on Yamhill street between First and Second, where they remained until the memorable fire of 1873 destroyed their home. The company's first truck consisted of a common wagon, with the original reach removed, and the ladder was formed of long poles made from a tall sapling split in two parts. With its primitive apparatus, this company did most effective work, however, and for many years it was one of the great companies of the volunteer fire department.

At the meeting referred to above, two committees were appointed for the purpose of completing arrangements for the organization of two engine companies, one for the northern and one for the southern districts of the city. The organization of the company for the northern district was effected on August 1 following, with an enrollment of 52 names. The first officers were:

- C.S. Silver - Foreman
- B. Stark - First Assistant
- D.C. Coleman - Second Assistant
- Charles Hutchins - Secretary
- Justus Steinberger - Treasurer

The first name proposed for the company was Protection. At the meeting held on August 8, there was some little discussion over the name. Mr. Failing suggested Cascade; Mr. Barnhart thought Pike would be suggestive; and Northerner was offered by Mr. Stark. This latter designation was finally adopted. At this meeting 24 men signed their names to the roll, which made them members of the company.

The company, like its predecessors, had none of the elements of permanency in its make-up, and in less than two months after its formation it was disorganized, not in a formal way but as an implied agreement on the part of its apathetic members.

### **Prominent Names Found**

In the southern district, Willamette Engine Company No. 1 was organized on August 6 of the same year, with the following officers:

- Neeson Ham - Foreman
- David Monastes - First Assistant
- Asa Strong - Second Assistant
- A.M. Berry - Secretary
- C.E. Williams - Treasurer

This company contained among its active members many men who have since become prominent in Portland's affairs. Among these may be mentioned C.H. Lewis, William S. Ladd, Henry Failing, George H. Williams, R.B. Knapp, and M.S. Burrell. These gentlemen served in the department for many years, and the aid and support they rendered the old fire department was of incalculable benefit to the city. The same interest these gentlemen always took in their private affairs was devoted unselfishly to the affairs of the fire department. Willamette Engine Company No. 1 was admitted by an act of the city council passed July 7, 1854.

On June 30, 1855, the council authorized the purchase of one of Smith's New York machines for the use of the local department. The boys then dubbed the primitive fire pumps "piano boxes." On August 2, 1856, the council passed a resolution which awarded this engine to Willamette company. It had been shipped to Portland via Cape Horn, and it was unloaded at the town wharf eight days after it had been awarded to the Willamettes' by the council. This was Portland's first fire engine owned by the

city. Two engines had been brought here before this time, however, by W.B. Otway, on the barge Mary Melville, which sailed into Portland's harbor July 28, 1852. For a time after their arrival the machines were in charge of P.A. Marquam. One of the engines was subsequently loaned to the Northern fire company on its organization. The other was purchased by G.W. Vaughn and was loaned to the Willamette fire company. The vicissitudes of the Vaughn engine carried it to the temporary use of Multnomah engine company, afterward organized in Portland, and finally to the fire department of Eugene, where it did most efficient service for many years.

### **Multnomah Company Formed**

The next fire company organized in Portland was the Multnomah Engine Company No. 2. The first enrollment list of 56 names was closed August 26, 1856. Four days later the company's first meeting was held. B.F. Goodwin was made chairman of the meeting and T.B. Trevett was appointed secretary. Twenty-nine men enrolled their names as members of the company, and the following officers were elected:

- B.F. Goodwin - Foreman
- L.M. Starr - First Assistant
- David Monastes - Second Assistant
- A.M. Starr - President
- A.C. Ripley - Secretary
- Thomas A. Davis - Treasurer

The city council passed an ordinance admitting this company on November 25 of the year of its organization (1856). Multnomah Engine Company No. 2 was an independent company, its equipment having been purchased with money obtained by popular subscription.

The engine for this company arrived from New York in November 1857. This company afterward owned the first steam fire engine placed in service on the coast. It was a Silsby rotary and was purchased at Seneca Falls, NY, and shipped to Portland by way of the Horn. It reached Portland in 1868, just in time to be made available for the big Stitzel Mill fire. It was in constant service for an entire week at that time in the endeavor made by the fire department to extinguish the smoldering fire in the sawdust, which had started from the fire in the mill. This is the engine now at No. 15's house.

One of the early presidents of Multnomah Engine Company N. 2 was Josiah Failing. Among the other prominent members were A.B. Hallock, Thomas A. Davis, Archie Williams, and T.B. Trevett. Mr Trevett was the last of the charter members of this company on the company's rolls when the paid department was organized. He saw 26 years and three months continuous service with the company.

On May 22, 1854, the council passed an ordinance organizing the Portland Fire Department. The first chief engineer of the department was H.W. Davis, who drew \$300 a year salary. Shubrick Norris was assistant. In 1855, at an election held for the chief and assistant of the Portland Fire Department, the first officers were re-elected. In September, 1856, Davis was again the successful candidate for the position of Chief, and Orin Joyne was made assistant. At the election in the following year the successful contestants for their respective offices of chief engineer and assistant were S.J. McCormick

and Charles Hutchins. During Mr. McCormick's incumbency he was absent in the east for several months and during his absence the council declared the office vacant and A.M. Starr was appointed to fill the vacancy. Mr. Starr, however, had been elected mayor of the city and he failed to qualify as chief engineer of the local department. On April 13, 1858, the assistant, Charles Hutchins, was elected chief. When Mr. McCormick again returned to Portland he was elected to the office of assistant of the fire department. For many years this gentleman was a bookseller and publisher here, but he afterward removed to San Francisco, where he was editor of the Catholic Monitor.

In 1857 the local fire department was reorganized as the result of a special ordinance passed by the city council on September 24 of that year. Under the terms of this ordinance Willamette Engine Company No. 1, Multnomah Engine Company No. 2 and Vigilance Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 were included in the department. The total number of men enrolled in the department at that time was 157.

In June 1859, the department was strengthened by the organization of Columbia Engine Company No. 3. This company elected the following officers:

- F. Carter - Foreman
- C. Devine - First Assistant
- William Cook - Second Assistant
- George Porter - President
- Thomas Neally - Secretary
- E.E. Kelly - Treasurer

The engine used by this company was what was known as a Jeffer's side stroke. This is the pump now at Spring street. In addition, the company owned a hose carriage, which carried nearly 1,000 feet of an excellent quality of hose. The engine house and the headquarters of the company were on Washington street, between Second and Third.

Columbia Engine Company No. 3 was the first of the Portland fire companies to use horses. These horses were purchased by the company, who also stood the entire expense of their care. When the old department was disbanded, Columbia had a considerable sum of money in the treasury. With this money the company voted the endowment of a bed in each of Portland's large hospitals, Good Samaritan and St. Vincents, and the remainder of the funds on hand were contributed to the Exempt Firemen's association, to provide for the care of the volunteer firemen's burial plot (Firefighter's Section) at Lone Fir Cemetery.

The rapid growth of Portland soon demanded the formation of another fire company, and on November 12, 1862, Protection Engine Company No. 4 was organized and promptly admitted to the department by the city council. The following were the first officers of this company:

- R. Hendry - Foreman
- H. Bullough - First Assistant
- J. Byrnes - Second Assistant
- A. Rosenheim - President

- W.T. Patterson - Secretary
- John B. Miller - Treasurer

This was the last fire company organized in Portland until February 13, 1873, when Tiger Engine Company #5 was formed. The great fire of December 22, 1872, has awakened the people of Portland to the necessity of affording additional protection to the city and it was this which led to the organization of the above company. The first enrollment of Tiger company included 52 names. The last fire company organized under the old volunteer fire department was Couch Engine Company No. 6, which was formed in 1880, with a total membership of 35.

Today the Portland Fire Department is on a firm foundation and has the pick of the city's manhood. Double platoons, comfortable houses, modern equipment, all go to make the lot of the firefighter of today a much different one from that of the boys who volunteered in the long ago. Especially is this so in the matter of training, though none of the old timers will admit that they were in any way inferior to the men who wear the city blue now.

The fully trained man who takes up fire fighting as a profession in these days has a hard row to hoe. He has to pass the most rigid of physical and mental examinations, and there is always the keenest of competition at the trials when the new members of the department are chosen.

Though the men of olden days were skilled enough and just as daring as are the members of the department at this time, they did not have to cope with the difficulties that beset their successors. The huge buildings, the traffic-crowded streets, the heavy apparatus, all call for a real degree of training and professional skill. The 1920 department is the outgrowth of the volunteer department of 1853 and resulted from the natural progression as the buildings multiplied.