

Jay W. Stevens

Jay W. Stevens, born in 1885, began his career in the fire service in 1900 when he became a volunteer firefighter in Weston, Nebraska. In 1903, at age 17, he moved to Portland, Oregon and joined the Portland Paid Fire Department on June 1, 1904. He was quickly promoted to Lieutenant in 1905 then Captain in 1906. A tireless worker for the public good, Stevens continued his ascent in the fire department when he was promoted to Battalion Chief in 1908.

In 1914, Portland, then a city of 300,000 citizens, elected to create a Fire Prevention Division of the fire department. The man chosen to lead it was Assistant Chief Jay Stevens. His assignment began on March 18th of that year. During his next three years, city fire losses dropped from \$1.7 million in 1914 to \$234,000 in 1917.

Stevens would leave Portland in 1917, not to rest on his successes, but to further the word of fire prevention. Before he left Oregon, he spent two months helping organize the newly formed State Fire Marshal's Office. From 1917 to 1921, he would head the "Fire Prevention Bureau of the Pacific," an organization on the west coast dedicated to the prevention of arson. This was taken over by the "National Board of Fire Underwriters" in 1921 and Stevens continued his leadership as the Assistant General Manager in the San Francisco office. In 1924 he began serving as the unpaid Fire Marshal of California, where he would continue his service under four consecutive Governors. He also served as the director of the National Fire Protection Association from 1922-1924.

As Stevens traveled the country to further fire prevention agendas, he would be named honorary Fire Marshal in 250 cities across the country. In one of his speeches to an assembly of 118 Oregon fire



chiefs, he was quoted as saying "Fire inspections are fire prevention; fire prevention is fire protection." His "Portland Plan" for fire prevention would eventually become the fire prevention plan for the National Board of Fire Underwriters."

Stevens was known to still be promoting fire prevention in 1956 when he headed up the International Association of Fire Chief's campaign to promote home inspections. Twenty-two states would

come on board for the campaign. It all came full circle when Portland Fire would win an IAFC award for home inspections in the late 1950s.

Chief Stevens died on March 26, 1980 in Walnut Creek, California at age 95. He was affectionately known throughout his career as the “Father of Fire Prevention.” His legacy also carries on in his family. His great grandson would become a firefighter in Gig Harbor, Washington.

