

## Oral History Update

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So far, so slow. Eleven retiring or retired firefighters have been interviewed. Digitally recorded, with audio files archived for future use. No immediate plans, beyond transcription at some point. Great information exchange, with so many details about recruiting, training, and operations over the decades. Still trying to interview one a week, but communication and scheduling is a challenge. Anyone who knows anyone who knows anyone can pass along Mike's name, number (in the book), and mail address. He'll be doing this for months to come. Some of the what's been learned, maybe one percent of the conversations:

- Hiring - Fire Department and Police Department applicants were given the same test, administered in the basement of Memorial Auditorium. The test included questions about education background, as well as city officials and department members known to the applicant. The tests included few or no questions relating to firefighting. Some applicants would be offered jobs in either department. (1950)
- Recruits - New firefighters were issued "high boots" and "globe clothes" consisting of a coat and pants. They would buy their own suspenders. They wore dress caps at fires. Helmets appeared around 1950. (1950)
- Dispatching - Before the era of radio dispatching, companies were dispatched by box alarms. Activating an alarm box sounded bells in all fire stations at once. All companies dressed and boarded their trucks. The first-due companies departed the station. The other companies in the city stayed awake awake (if at night) at near their trucks until either "all clear" was sounded (three bells) or additional companies were requested. (1950 and later)
- Dispatching - Two switchboard operators worked opposite shifts at Station 1 on South Salisbury Street. They did not know the streets, so if a call came by telephone, they rang the Captain downstairs who told them which companies to send. (1950)
- Memorial Auditorium Fire Watch - Personnel were hired off-duty to perform "fire watch" duties at select events at Memorial Auditorium. They would mill about the event, keeping an eye out for safety hazards such as blocked or locked exits. (1950 and later)
- Chief Cars - The department had two cars, one for Fire Prevention and one that was shared by the Fire Chief and Assistant Chief. The chiefs worked alternating shifts. (1950 and later)
- Alarm Bells - Fire alarms were signaled by alarm bells corresponding to box numbers. If the alarm "4-4-4-4" was sounded, that was the signal to contact the dispatcher for the street address. (1950s)
- Ladder 6 - The 1939 / 1916 American LaFrance aerial ladder served at Station 6 for a period of time. To accommodate its length, the windows in the rear of the bay were removed and an enclosure was created to protect the ground ladders that stuck out. (1960s)
- Station 1 - The Fire Prevention Office at Station 1 was located in the front center of the upstairs area. The dormitory was a single room, and the captains had separate sleeping quarters. The Assistant Chief also had his own sleeping area. The Fire Chief's office was downstairs, near the kitchen. The Fire Chief's secretary also had her own office downstairs. (1960s)
- Station 4 - The original Station 4 on Jefferson Street had a small kitchen behind the apparatus bay, built by firefighters. Before it was built, the station bathroom served as the kitchen. The station had just three rooms excluding the apparatus bay. (1960s)
- Hiring & Recruits - The Naval Reserve Center on Western Boulevard was used for accepting job applications, and for classroom instruction of new recruits. (1974)
- Apparatus - Drivers were not allowed to drive the new Mack pumpers until they had been "Macksidized," or appropriately trained. (1970s)
- Station 1 - The Station 1 dormitory was the last dormitory to have partitions added. They were added, as they were in the other fire stations, to accommodate the introduction of female firefighters. (1980s)
- Miscellaneous - Starting salaries: \$4,860/year, 1950. \$6,100/year, 1974. \$8,600/year, 1977. \$15,890/year, 1986.

Name: (real name)

Remember personal info?

preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

Yes

No

Comment:

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To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

**What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?**

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

**Small print:** All html tags except <b> and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.