



HISTORY OF THE IDAHO FALLS FIRE DEPARTMENT

Updated 2020

The Idaho Falls Fire Department began in the early days when the city was known as Eagle Rock. Early in 1885, Eagle Rock experienced a fire that wiped out nearly all of the frame shacks along Eagle Rock Street. On a Sunday night in 1885, residents gathered in the Brewery Saloon where they appointed twenty volunteers to serve on the first fire department: Ed F. Winn, Chief; William A. Wheller, Assistant Chief; W.B. Green, Secretary; and Jon Glen, Treasurer. The first fire station was located on Eagle Rock Street.

Each volunteer paid a \$1 fee, and a vote was cast to buy a hose cart. To raise money for the cart, a dance was held at Glen Wheeler's house on New Year's night, ending with a midnight supper at Dick Chamberlain's saloon. A hose cart and 300 feet of hose were purchased with the \$150 raised that evening. The railroad company agreed to install three fire hydrants to assist the newly created department. (We now have more than 1400 fire hydrants within the city.) Over the next few years, volunteers in brightly colored uniforms and the man-drawn equipment were the extent of the department. It was not until 1907 that the man-drawn cart was replaced by a horse-drawn wagon. At this time, Julius Marker, who later became fire chief, was appointed as the first driver of the horse-drawn wagon. He was also the first firefighter to receive pay.

Thanks to more than two years of strong will and determination by the department, motorized firefighting equipment replaced the horse-drawn apparatus in 1916. In 1919, the department purchased a second motorized fire engine and increased the number of paid personnel to six, plus the chief.

The early fire department was housed in several different locations throughout the city before moving to the city building on Shoup Avenue in 1930. This station and fire department headquarters served the department and the community until 2017 when headquarters moved to a newly constructed station located at 343 "E" Street.

In June of 2018, we placed our newest engine (491) into service. The "push in ceremony" originated from the time of horse-drawn equipment that could not be easily backed into a building by the horses. In some places, water from the old apparatus was transferred to the new apparatus often leading to spillage. This then required the apparatus to be wiped down. And, occasionally when a new engine or piece of equipment arrived, one of the mutual aid companies had the honor of escorting it to the fire company's firehouse and placing it in service. The tradition varies in origin but the overarching common theme is that of pride.

In 1952, IFFD purchased a Seagrave engine that accompanied the opening of the new fire station on 8th Street. We had the engine for many years, retiring it sometime in the late 70's or early 80's. While the trail of where it went was unclear, it remained a favorite among staff. In the fall of 2019, a gentleman came to Station 1 on E Street to show us a picture of a fire engine he found in a field somewhere in Ucon. Proudly taking out his phone, he displayed a photo of IFFD's long lost 1952 Seagrave, stating that he was the owner and that he was looking for a new buyer. The is in incredible condition for its age and for being outside in the weather for so long. The Idaho Falls Fire Museum, a nonprofit started a few years ago, now owns the engine with an end goal of restoring it back to its original glory.

1889 - 1907

- **1889** - Village of Eagle Rock incorporated. Volunteer fire department served the town for many years. Man-drawn carts were used until 1907.
- **1891** - Eagle Rock became Idaho Falls on August 28, 1891.
- **1902** - A. D. Wright became the second fire chief during this year and the station moved to its second location near Broadway and Park Avenue.
- **1905** - Approximately this time J. W Galey was appointed fire chief and served until 1909.
- **1907** - Horse drawn wagon began use. The cost was \$1950. Julius Marker was the first "driver" of horse drawn equipment. The third fire station was a frame building on Park Avenue where Harris Publishing is located. Exact date moved from Broadway and Park is Unknown but probably same date as horse drawn equipment came into use. Between 1907 and 1909 the first two people on the department received pay. They were Julius Marker and Lew Tolley who were the two "drivers" of horse drawn equipment.
- **1909** - Walley Sheriff named chief and was the first paid chief. He served one month in that capacity. Volunteers were notified of calls by the ringing of a large bell. The bell is on display at the Bonneville County Museum.
- **1910** - Julius Marker appointed chief to replace Walley Sheriff and served until 1938 when he died. Within a few years the fire station moved to larger quarters in a single story building on Park Avenue (SH Kress/Bonanza building) in the 500 block.
- **1916** - First motorized fire equipment on the scene. It was a 1916 American LaFrance pumper. The chief and two firefighters were paid at this time by the city.
- **1920** - When second motorized truck purchased(a 1919 Brockway) the department was increased to six paid firefighters plus the Chief.

1930 - 1949

- **1930** - New city hall was constructed on Shoup Avenue with room for fire station. Fire station moved from Park Avenue into this building. The fire bell was replaced by a siren on top of the building. In November a big combination ladder and hose engine (1928 American LaFrance) was purchased (\$13,850) and another man added to the force. The truck was on

display at the 1929 World Fair as state of the art fire apparatus. This vehicle is still used today for parades and other public relations events. With eight men including the Chief now on the City payroll, the department operated two shifts of four men each. Call personnel available by phone and siren.

- **1932** - Fire loss per capita for the year was \$5.99 primarily due to Lambrecht Building fire which was worst of year.
- **1933** - Fire loss for the year equaled \$.79 per capita.
- **1937** - A Seagrave pumper was purchased
- **1938** - Julius Marker died and was replaced by L.G. Jackson as Chief.
- **1945** - 12 paid men added to the department operating three engines.
- **1947** - American LaFrance (403) open cab pumper was purchased.
- **1949** - L.G. Jackson was replaced by Bert Brown as Fire Chief in June of this year.

1950 - 1966

- **1950** - Person power increased to 18 paid personnel.
- **1952** - December 2, 1952, Captain Joel Humphreys dies when overcome by smoke in the basement of Spencer Grocery at North Boulevard and May Street.
- **1953** - Second fire station built on 8th Street in the 500 block. The lot cost \$5,000 and the building \$76,500. It was a single engine company station as well as the department maintenance shop. In 1990 this station became the office of Fire Prevention Bureau. During this year a 1953 Seagrave pumper (404) was purchased.
- **1959** - New American LaFrance pumper (405) was purchased.
- **1960** - Person power increased to 40 paid personnel.
- **1961** - Parley Gillan was appointed as Chief.
- **1963** - Person power increased to 44 paid personnel.
- **1964** - Carl Poulter was appointed Chief in January to replace Parley Gillan. A \$587,000 General Obligation Improvement Bond was approved.
- **1965** - Third fire station was built at Skyline and Grandview. The cost of land was \$10,450 and the building was \$102,979. In December 1993 this building became the Bonneville County Emergency 911 Communications Center. Idaho Falls Firefighters joined the International Association of Firefighters and became union affiliated on July 22. They became Local 1565. Twenty-one additional paid personnel were hired. Les Corcoran was appointed Chief to replace Carl Poulter.
- **1966** - Bond election to purchase two new Seagrave pumpers at cost of \$34,814 each and to install an alarm box system throughout the city. Fire District was formed to provide fire protection to an area outside the city limits that covered approximately 390 square miles.

1970 - 1989

- **1970** - In May of this year the fire department began providing ambulance service. Intensive training for emergency care began in August for fire department and police personnel.
- **1971** - In June of this year, 17 firefighters received the 81 hour Emergency Medical Technical (EMT) course.
- **1972** - In March to December of this year a pilot paramedic program was given to four firefighters. Program was not implemented however.
- **1973** - January was beginning of paramedic course for 10 firefighters. The course ran through July. Ten firefighters certified as Trauma Paramedics. Nine of the ten firefighters trained as trauma paramedics completed cardiac intensive care paramedic training by the end of October.
- **1974** - All Paramedics received certification through the State of Idaho. 911 Service became operational at City Hall
- **1975** - City purchased the new Walters Crash Truck for airport coverage.
- **1977** - A new station was constructed at Lincoln and Woodruff which replaced the old Station 2 on 8th Street. The new station cost was \$209,348 and the arrangement between the City and Fire District was to split the costs as one third for the Fire District and two thirds for the City. On November 30th, Doug Call was appointed Chief to replace Les Corcoran who retired.
- **1978** - In January of this year the new 911 dispatch center became operational at LEB on Capital Avenue with civilian dispatchers.
- **1982** - New FMC pumper purchased for \$155,000
- **1983** - Pierce Minuteman Crash Truck purchased for airport
- **1986** - New Pirsch pumper purchased
- **1988** - New Pierce pumper purchased for \$174,049
- **1989** - Dick Hahn was appointed Chief on July 30 of this year. Land was purchased for Station 4 on Woodruff near Sunnyside for \$60,882.

1990 - 1998

- **1990** - Six personnel were added for airport fire protection. Property at Bellin and Mill Road was purchased by City for use as well and possible fire Station. The 8th Street Fire Station became the office for Fire Prevention.
- **1991** - In October the Bonneville County Fire District merged with the City under a contractual agreement. Fourteen fire district personnel became City employees. In November two new fire stations constructed and occupied. One new station 3 at the airport (cost \$789,648, 90% federally funded) to replace old station 3 at Skyline and Grandview. An additional station at Woodruff and Sunnyside became Station 4 at a cost of \$586,963.

- **1992** - The Hazardous Materials Unit formed for response to Hazmat Incidents. Several firefighters trained to Hazmat Tech Level.
- **1993** - The new emergency 911 Computerized Dispatch Center was operational at 911 North Skyline Drive (old fire station 3) in December. Contracted supplementary fire department services to EG and G/DOE for in-town facilities.
- **1995** - In October a new station 5 was occupied at Bellin and Mill Road in the southwest section of the City. The cost of the station was approximately \$500,000. New Pierce pumper purchased and placed into operation at Fire Station 1. The price was \$210,000.
- **1996** - On April 11 Dennis Johnson was appointed Chief to replace Dick Hahn who retired on March 29. Fire Marshall Terry Edwards retired May 31. On August 4th the Fire Department Staff reorganized from having three Battalion Chiefs on shift, an EMS Chief and Fire Marshall to having four Division Chiefs working 40 hours per week. The four positions of responsibility are Fire Prevention/Public Relations, Administration, EMS and Special Operations.
- **1996** - Dennis Johnson retired as Chief on December 27 and Don Gosswiller was appointed on January 5, 1997. Acting Chief by Mayor Milam.
- **1997** - On January 5th, Don Gosswiller became acting Fire Chief. He was appointed to Chief on March 2, 1997.
- **1998** - On December 4th, Don Gosswiller retired as Chief. Bob Drake was appointed as the Chief on December 6.

2001 - 2006

- **2001** - A two year extension was signed with Bonneville County Fire Protection District. May 23 took delivery of Engine 14, a 2000 E-1 International \$185,000. On November 18 Mike Sheets was appointed Fire Marshall. In December Gene Rockwood to FPB as 2nd Inspector. FPB increased by 1 man
- **2002** - On August 9 Robert (Bob) Drake retired as Chief of the Fire Department. On August 11 Dean Ellis was appointed Chief by Mayor Linda Milam.
- **2003** - On June 12 the City Council unanimously approved a 10 year agreement with the Bonneville County Fire Protection District. This came about after many months of negotiations with the Commissioners (Jack Vernon, Wade Campbell and Matt Morgan) and their Liaison Officer (Dick Fowler). City Council members involved were; Ida Hardcastle, Brad Eldredge, Joe Groberg, Robert Barnes (who replaced Bruce Rose when he went to work for the City of Ammon), Bill Shurtleff and Mike Lehto. Mayor Linda Milam and City Clerk Rose Anderson signed the documents. The Fire Department took delivery of a new Ambulance in June of this year. Bid was awarded to Pierce for a new Commercial Pumper in June. On July 8th and 9th the Chief and Staff interviewed twenty-one Civil Service New Firefighter candidates to fill 7 positions. The seven guys hired will start the 4 week training program on July 28. They will start on shift August 25th. The names of the 7 guys hired are; Josh Jacobsen, Lance Quick, Brandon Rich, Nick Stallings, Cody Anderson, Rob Hall, and Nick Hirschi. This will get us back to full staff on shift of 84 firefighters. We have been short since August 2002 due to the City/County Contract. Took delivery of a new Portable Air

Filling Station in September of this year. This was received from the Federal Fire Acts Grant of 2002. Lynn Brown and Nolan Getsinger retired in December of this year.

- **2004** - Six firefighters were chosen to be in a Paramedic Class held in Blackfoot; Paul Radford, Adrian Russell, Tony Martin, Steve Farnsworth, Bob Zaladonis, and Scott Grimmett. They started January 5th. We interviewed 6 applicants for firefighter due to the retirement of Lynn Brown and Nolan Getsinger. Richard Bates and Mike Niles were hired and they start work February 2. Took delivery of new Pierce Pumper on an International Chassis on March 20th. On March 31st John Simpson resigned from the Fire Department. Joseph (Tory) Stewart hired to replace John Simpson. He started work in June. L. A Weight Loss Fire 503 S Woodruff \$700,000 damage. July 4th Arson fire at the 4th Street Post Office Building. Dave Peck retired July 22 of this year. July 23 Captain Brett Johnson appointed to A Platoon as Platoon Captain due to the retirement of Dave Peck. Scott Criddle retired which leaves an opening in fire prevention for an inspector. Took delivery of a new Regional Response Haz Mat truck on Dave Coffey promoted to Captain August 8th, to replace Dave Peck. Joe Nichols chosen to be the new fire inspector and starts Sept 22. On October 6th Interviewed 15 candidates to fill 3 vacancies created by retirements and 2 new positions offered in the Ambulance budget by the County. Parker Ruby, Wynn Whitmeyer, Steve Walker, Keith Morse and Isaac Eaton are hired and will start October 25, 2004. Jim Deuel retired on October 15th. Rick Taylor was appointed to Division Chief to fill the vacancy and will start October 18th. On November 2 Brad Pettingill was appointed to B Platoon as Platoon Captain due to the appointment of Rick Taylor to Division Chief. Ralph Risenmay was promoted to Captain effective October 31 to replace Taylor's vacancy with his promotion to Division Chief. Stay on A Shift. Dave Lamont was promoted to driver effective October 31st to replace Ralph Risenmay due to his promotion. Lamont transferred to B Platoon. Rick Ackerman transferred to A Platoon. Gene Rockwood transferred to B Platoon. Dave Coffey transferred to C Platoon and Chris Farnsworth transferred to A Platoon. These transfers are effective end of October and first of November.
- **2005** - On June 10-12 the First Annual Eastern Idaho Fire Chiefs Conference was held in Idaho Falls at EITC. There were 160 plus registered attendees. In July the IFFD took possession of a D Con trailer furnished by the State of Idaho for the Regional Response Haz Mat Team. This came with many dollars of equipment for decontamination of victims and personnel. On September 5 the IFFD sent six personnel to help in the Hurricane Katrina Disaster in Louisiana and Mississippi. Dave Hunter, Brandon Rich, Brian Wood, Duane Nelson, Jeff Parsons and Lance Johnson all volunteered the day after. They spent their time in Gulfport, Mississippi. One stayed 4 weeks, 4 stayed 5 weeks and one stayed 6 weeks. In October Rick Ackerman is pursuing a medical retirement with the neck and back surgeries he has had from AOs. He has been on light duty at fire prevention for an extended period of time. We received an award through the Fire Act Grant for all new SCBAs. The grant was \$300,000 approximately. We hired 3 new firefighters; Dan Muhlestien, Sean Allen and Jon Drollinger. One was an extra paid by the City and the District to bring manning to 4 at Station 5 with the 2 received last year from the Ambulance budget. On November 16 Captain Gary Day retired. John Tenerowicz was promoted to Captain to fill his vacancy. Rick Saunders was promoted to Driver to take Tenerowicz vacancy. Jared Fuhrman was elected as the new Mayor of Idaho Falls. Karen Cornwell is a new

councilperson. On December 22 Captain Kim Getsinger retired. Sam Villabisencio was promoted to Captain to fill the Vacancy. In December the IFFD took possession of a new GMC 1 ton crew cab Pickup as the prime mover for the Haz Mat D Con trailer. New Ambulance delivered this month from Med Tech. Curtis Clark filled the vacancy of a drivers position due to Rick Ackerman retiring.

- **2006** - In January Ida Hardcastle and Karen Cornwell joined the new Fire Department Council Committee. The Council approved a piggyback bid on the new ambulance delivered in December for the same cost. Projected delivery in May.
- **2018** - September 4-15, 2018 In September, Idaho Falls Fire Department Paramedic William (Bill) Denos was deployed for two weeks on the Boot Fire in the eastern Sierra Mountains. This fire was considered the highest priority fire in the nation for the 11 days while firefighters kept the blaze from reaching the Marine Corps Warfare Training Center which serves as the premier training location for Marine Corps, Department of Defense, allied and coalition military units. Firefighters also protected critical communication sites on both Mean and Sweetwater Peaks, as well as existing natural vegetation associated with the area. IFFD EMS Division Chief, Eric Day was also deployed on that fire as a Medical Unit Leader. The fire burned 6,974 acres and reached 100 percent containment on September 15. IFFD Firefighter/Paramedic William Denos received a letter of appreciation from K.H. Hutchison, Commanding Officer, Colonel, United State Marine Corps for his "quick response, leadership, professionalism, and most importantly your bravery," as well as serving a "central role in protecting our base."
- **2020** - On December 7, 2020 We held a small push-in ceremony today at station 4 (Woodruff Avenue & Sunnyside Road). Starting today, engine 4 will be one of our frontline response engines, replacing an older engine that met its 15-year life cycle and will go into reserve. Fire Chief Duane Nelson and Deputy Chief Jon Perry joined station 4 personnel as they washed, pushed in and placed engine 4 into service. Driver Levi McAfee was behind the wheel. The push-in ceremony is a tradition in the fire service. Back in the day, horse-drawn engines had to be pushed into the station. When water was transferred from an old horse-drawn engine to the new one, some of the water would splash onto the new one and have to be dried off. A fire engine is a source of pride for our department and the community.