

Eagle Fire District History July 1946 to September 1963

It wasn't a fire but a fire scare that motivated the formation of the Eagle Fire Protection District. On a Sunday afternoon the Fourth of July weekend in 1946, a cry went up, "The Eagle Merc is on fire!" Within minutes every available hose from homes in the area was in use; however, it was the strong right arm of Mrs. May Russell on the pitcher pump handle and the "never-give-up" attitude of people who just wouldn't quit on the bucket brigade that made it a fire scare rather than a disastrous fire. Yes, we lost the garage and the storehouse and a lean-to on the back of the Merc, but the results of the fire bombs furnished by W.K. Long, together with the arrival of the fire truck from Gowen Field, relieved the pressure on the pitcher pump and the bucket brigade. We saved the Merc and the Odd Fellows Lodge building. As a matter of fact, the men on the Gowen Field tract asked why we even bothered to call them.

With this as basic history, we had no trouble getting a big group of people out to attend a mass meeting in the I.O.O.F. Hall to talk fire protection. The result of this meeting was that a \$300 deposit (furnished by Ralph Wilson, Orville Jackson and W. K. Long) was made with the state purchasing agent in order that our name could be put on file so we could bid on a war surplus fire truck.

During the time of the money was cooling in the office of the state purchasing agent, we didn't exactly fall asleep, for during this interim, we learned of statutes in the Idaho law providing for the formation of rural fire districts. With very little persuasion on the part of Norval Ostroot and Chester Edwards the I.O.O.F. Lodge in Eagle was prevailed upon to finance the formation of such a district, which they agreed to do to the extent of \$100. In order to establish boundaries down to an area where we knew the people would back the idea by biting themselves into such a taxing unit. This area included the old common school district 12 of Eagle and adjoining district 25 (Linder), a combined area of about 16 square miles.

A legal petition was drawn up by attorney T.M. Roberts who assisted us on the Sunday Eagle Merc fire scare, and a map of the area was drawn for us by the county surveyor's office. This map cost \$25, the most expensive single item of the formation of the district. Other areas that have joined the Eagle Fire District since the original formation are Pleasant View, Brookside and Green Meadow, making an area of about 28 square mile. The first legal step of the organization was accomplished in 1947.

Chester Edwards, Carl Marshall and Don Crawford were appointed by the Governor of Idaho as the first board of commissioners. After serving a two year term, Don Crawford indicated his desire to resign and Oscar Peterson was elected in his place. The board of Edwards, Marshall, and Peterson has served since that time, with Norval Ostroot as secretary-treasurer.

In July of 1948 the first tax assessment was made, which provided for the first money for the district in January 1949. Still moving slowly and carefully, the commissioners did not spend any of their limited funds until November of 1949, when through the efforts of one of the fire equipment salesmen we located a used 400-gallon-per-minute centrifugal pumper in Granger, Washington. Armed only with a certified check and some warm clothes, Ralph Fluharty, postmaster at that time and later retired, and Norval Ostroot set out for Granger. About midnight the next day they returned with the first piece of the equipment to be owned by the district. This 1931 model pumper, our first line of defense, was soon supported by an 1170 gallon tank truck.

Now we were faced with a storage problem. It was costing us a dollar a day to store the pumper in a heater garage, and with a water filled tank to consider, we needed a fire station and didn't have nearly enough money to build one.

Our district seems to have been blessed with the right help at the right time, and so it was when we needed the new fire station. George Rizze was the man of the hour. He furnished the finances to buy the ground and build the engine room portion of the fire station together with the furnace, at a total cost of \$5,000. The district in turn rented the station from Mr. Rizzi for \$1,000 per year for five years, at the end of which time we paid him \$1.00 and he signed over to us the title of the property.

With community spirit exemplified in this generous manner by George Rizzi, how could a volunteer fireman's association be anything other than successful? The pattern was set. Next, a bid to the City of Boise brought us a 750-gallon-per-minute pumper, which we still own and operate as our stand-by unit where volume and stationary pumping might be required. Many of us vividly recall the night of the Downing fire. The loft of that big white barn had been filled with chopped hay and bedding straw, and somehow a hot spot developed so that when the loft broke into flames we had a real fire. After what seemed hours of work and pouring water on the barn the old Howe pumper had just as much power and kick as ever except we noticed that the big stream of water coming from the 2-1/2 inch hose with the clay pipe nozzle was weaving much heavier than usual. As we suspected there was only one volunteer fireman, Warren Hicks, on the nozzle. He was hanging on and in good shape, but the pressure of the water in the hose had lifted him about seven inches off the ground. Since that time the district has replaced the old Continental motor with a Reo engine. This 1931 Howe has an open cab and falls into the category of an antique. Its large 750 gallon-per-minute capacity lends much to the 10% reduction in our fire insurance enjoyed by the patrons of our fire district.

With interest indeed on a district-wide basis and so that the fire station could be the center of the community, a cooperative effort by all the organizations in the area set aside one day and we raised money by auction food sales, ticket sales, etc., that the result being a club room or community center attached to the rear of the fire station. This combination room is used by nearly every organization in the district, in addition to many family parties, birthday celebrations, etc. It was completed in 1953 and immediately put into use. Its popularity seemed to increase for several years along with the costs of maintaining heat and power for its

use. Organizations which were making regular use of it decided that it should be self-sustaining from a financial point and since 1959 it has been divorced from the Eagle Fire District and operates as the Northside Community Center.

In 1954 a general meeting was called by the commissioners of the district for the men of the community. Ted Downing acted as temporary chairman. After discussion of the needs for a volunteer fireman's organization an election was held at which time Ben Millikan was chosen as chairman and first president of what came to be our Eagle Volunteer Fireman's Association. Many of the original fellows still hold membership and others have joined so that we maintain an active association of 30 or more men. Meetings continue to be held according to the original schedule on the first and third Tuesday of each month.

It soon became apparent to the volunteer firemen that they as an association could add many necessary items to the firefighting equipment and especially to the life saving angle such as a resuscitator or Scott air packs. A decision was soon made to have a Fireman's Benefit Dance and to make the dance an annual affair if it proved to be a success. The first dance was held on Saturday, March 19, 1955 and has since that time been held on the Saturday in March that falls closest to St. Patrick's Day. Funds from this money raising event have been put to good use by the volunteers year after year. One most of us remember is the fireworks display which in the past has been shown on July 3rd of each year. Some question the value of this expense since fireworks are now shown in so many areas on July 4th.

The community room of the fire station became so busy over the years that often the firemen's meetings were pushed out into the engine room. This brought about a desire on the part of the Fire District Commissioners and the Eagle Volunteer Firemen to join together to build an addition onto the fire station and also provide club room space for the Volunteers. This became a joint venture between the two units. The district purchased the materials and the volunteers provided the labor to erect a 48 X 50 foot addition to the original fire station. The front 30 X 48 feet would be used to house fire equipment as it was added to the district and the back 20 X 48 feet would be used as a permanent club room for the volunteers. After a year and a half the volunteer firemen accumulated enough funds to finish the inside of their club room, tilting the floor, finishing the ceiling, building cabinets and completing a snack area. Then chairs and sofas were added.

Upon completion in 1962 this room was dedicated to the memory of Ben Millikan whose untimely death in an airplane accident was keenly felt by many. A wall plaque bearing his name was unveiled at the dedication. Shingles bearing the names of other volunteer firemen who were active at the time of their death hang from this plaque.

During the year of 1955, it became our good fortune to be able to buy on a lease basis a big truck and pumper from the Franklin Whitney Fire District. Money was needed for the transactions of this type, and once again we had a helper. This time Orville Jackson covered the costs beyond our ability to pay and by January of 1958 he had been reimbursed. One year

later, in 1959, we had completed our purchase lease agreement with the Franklin Whitney Fire District.

This fine pumper, rated at 500 gallon-per-minute, is a centrifugal type pumper operating from independently mounted industrial motor. This truck also carries an auxiliary 500 gallon water supply, two high pressure hose reels and nearly 100 feet of 2 ½ inch hose. At the recommendation of the volunteer firemen the Fire District Commissioners were able to sell to the Star firemen our first pumper truck. This pumper truck had become surplus because our buildings now housed the 500 gallon pumper and two tank trucks. The second tank truck was built on a 1948 Model G.M.C. chassis and had a carrying capacity of 1250 gallons of water. To these units were added portable pumps each capable of pumping 100 gallons of water per minute. These Hale centrifugal pumps have proved to be a real asset and have many times proved their value in the area. We are proud of the firefighting equipment, and you who live in the district can also be justly proud, for your tax dollars have, without a question, been wisely used. Please keep in mind, especially so on some cold miserable night when the siren is sounding, that the Eagle Fire District supported by the Eagle Volunteer Firemen, operates on less money than perhaps any other rural fire district in the State of Idaho. None of the personnel has ever received as much as one penny for his time, efforts and loyal service.

It might be of interest to many to know that each piece of truck equipment is tested regularly as to performance and each is kept in good working condition. This is very important to all of us. Knowing that each pump on each truck is ready to discharge water in volume under all conditions is of prime consideration. Heated engine rooms give us assurance against freezing. The rated pumping capacity of the pumps is as follows: the stationary pumper at 700 gallons-per-minute, the mobile pump at 500 gallons-per-minute and the two portable units each at 100 gallons-per-minute.

The trucks carry water as there is not one hydrant in the entire 28 square miles of our rural fire district. 3170 gallons of water is the total amount on wheels; the two tank trucks each carrying 1250 gallons. This two tank truck setup permits us to use a shuttle system of refilling a truck while the second tank is being used when the extent of the fire demands. For this purpose a special 10 inch well was drilled by the business men and residents close in. The volunteers purchased a big electric pump that is mounted inside a heated building to provide water for the tank truck refills at all times of day and in any weather condition. When you realize that the water is out of the ditches five months of every year you can see the importance of this supply. We also have available to us a 10 inch drilled well on the school grounds for such fire protection.

Our interests in community service have not been confined to fire fighting alone. Quoting from Section 3 of the Constitution of the Eagle Volunteer Firemen's Association, "It shall be the object of this Association to sponsor adequate social activities for its members in the interests of member cooperation on general community fellowship." This might help to explain the assistance we gave to the building of the tennis courts at Eagle Junior High School, the erection

of the playground equipment at the Eagle Grade School, the fireworks display previously mentioned or the joint venture with the Eagle Lions Club for Christmas decorating.

THE FIREMAN'S CREED

Consideration for the feelings and opinions of others.

Obedience to orders and discipline. Give this obedience cheerfully, remember,
Strict obedience to orders and duty welds together a strong and efficient fire department.

Understanding of all parts of our work is necessary, as is an understanding of the ambitions, hopes and pride of all the people.

Respect for the rights of others. The big "I" attitude toward other people is extreme Discourtesy.

Truthfulness is an important part of courtesy. We must respect the intelligence of others, and always be truthful. Don't forget that using a little tact with this will often earn a person's lasting gratitude.

Energy. Don't hesitate to use your energy to promote the welfare and good standing of your Department. Always take the necessary time and expend the energy required to answer questions plainly, intelligently and accurately.

Service. Prepare yourself to render skillful service. Then make this service willingly, give it cheerfully. That little extra service above strict duty is the masterful touch.

Yield the floor in discussion. Yielding to the other fellow will bring rich yields of friendship and satisfaction.