

CITY ORGANIZED PROTECTION  
(From the Pleasant Grove Sesquicentennial History, Volume II)

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## Fire Department

During the fifty-eight years before the organization of the Pleasant Grove Volunteer Fire Department the means to fight local fires remained extremely limited and the damage usually total. Through the creation of that arm of the local government, fire fighting and humanitarian services gradually grew into an exceptional good service to the community.

A source of early commercial and house fires often came from overheated chimneys from wood-burning stoves, or fireplaces in winter and during summer canning season. Wooden shingles on rooftops became as dry as tinder leaving them vulnerable to chimney sparks. Source of light inside rooms—open flames from tallow candles or oil-burning lamps—could ignited materials near them, just a few early fire causes.

When a fire began, people made frantic attempts to douse the flames, but little could be done to arrest the blaze. At the shout of “fire,” neighbors came running, buckets in hand, to assist. They formed a bucket-brigade from the well, or more often, from a nearby stream. One of the first to arrive on the fire scene would run up the main ditch and divert the irrigation stream into the nearest ditch. Cooperative neighbors stood as the only hope against dreaded, destructive flames.

Fire took its toll on public buildings as well as dwellings and farm buildings. The destruction of the school house in 1860, the first recorded town fire, and the initial detailed fire, that of the first burning of the church house that faced 200 South just off Main: On 6 February 1871, at 5 A.M. the citizens lost not only their first and only building built for worship but their post office, housed in the basement, their store of 300 bushels of wheat, some flour, corn, and potatoes, also stored in the basement. The tithing office, drama scenery, and church library—all destroyed, while they managed to save a few bushels of wheat stored for Provo. A fire in 1903 again destroyed the rebuilt church.<sup>1</sup>

Sanborn and Company, a Denver based fire insurance company, made the first fire insurance map of Pleasant Grove in 1890; between then and 1908, twelve fires within the five block downtown fire-map limits (the area mapped by Sanborn and Co.) destroyed twelve buildings, with eleven totally lost. The quick action of the Clarks and their neighbors saved some of that store inventory when the Clark Mercantile and opera house burned. The other buildings destroyed: a saloon, a general stores, a drug store, dwellings, a harness shop, a warehouse, a livery stable, a shoe repair shop, and the 1903 fire that destroyed the church house. The loss totaled around \$100,000 in this downtown fire map area alone. None but the downtown area had been mapped. Immediately after the church house fire, the city repaired the stovepipe in the soft-rock city hall and took out insurance on the building.<sup>2</sup>

These heavy losses and pressure from the Sanborn Company resulted in the city installing a gravity water system in the downtown fire district in 1905-6. They installed four fire hydrants on strategic corners and the city purchased a cart-mounted hose reel, 300 feet of two-and-one-half-inch hose, and one nozzle from ZCMI in 1906, at the price of \$210,75. They left use of the equipment

to citizens under the direction of short-term fire chiefs. Early in 1908, a fire started inside Thornton's general store. With good intentions, the first citizens to arrive hooked a hose to a hydrant, broke into the store, and let loose with the one-inch nozzle, quickly saving the building. However, \$6,000 to \$8,000 in stock became ruined when they left the water running until the basement nearly filled. A trained and knowledgeable fire department became the next step.<sup>3</sup>

The Pleasant Grove Volunteer Handcart Company came into existence through a city council decision under the leadership of Mayor Albert E. Cooper, 21 February 1910. They appointed Si Kemp as the initial long-term chief. Kemp had been a volunteer fireman in Eureka. The council authorized him to form a fire fighting crew. In answer to the call, Kemp rallied a number of interested citizens on a Wednesday evening in mid-March 1910. That night they organized themselves into a volunteer fire brigade, to be officially known as Pleasant Grove Hose Company No.1. They chose officers, i.e., Assistant Chief, Hans Williams; Secretary, Henry Jeppson; Treasurer, Clarence Clark; and Master of Arms, Anton Hecker. "These with Joseph Walker, George Hayes, Leon Smith, Ole Christiansen and Chris Williamson complete the brigade. The maiden drill was quite a spectacular scene." They planned a dance to raise funds for uniforms.<sup>4</sup> The men attended fire schools, held regular drills and did their best on a limited city budget.

The department soon recognized the need of something other than water to quell electric and gas originated fires. Three five-and-one-half gallon containers of chemicals became an addition to the equipment in 1910, at the cost of \$50. That year badges for the firemen, more fire hose, and a garden hose were purchased. City fathers searched unsuccessfully for a suitable place on Main Street to house the new firefighting equipment. They finally had Ole Christiansen build a small false-front shed to the south-rear of the soft-rock city hall in the fall of 1912, where they stored the hose cart and equipment. In 1914, the city began to house the hose cart in the Old Bell School, having just purchased the building from the Pleasant Grove school district. They enlarged the south door of the school for easy hose cart entrance, and from then on the ringing of the school bell summoned the men to a fire.<sup>5</sup>

Methods of improving their service became top priority for the department as population and buildings increased. Before long members of the fire department petitioned the city to install a telephone at chief Kemp's residence for better communication and faster response. The men drilled regularly, making practice runs and testing the equipment. Many problems hampered efficient service. A fire broke out at a Mrs. Johnson's house, but with hydrants out of range, even for their added hose lengths and they found her water hydrant out of commission, leaving the volunteers feeling helpless. Firemen also felt frustrated when they realized the cause of some fires.

Children hiding behind haystacks to play with matches caused several fires on farmsteads. In 1915, Henry Bush, on west Center, lost six to eight tons of harvested hay, the following year Alfred Bezzant lost one ton. Small children with matches caused both fires. Numerous men used pitchforks to frantically move the hay from the direction of the fire while the department sprayed water on the flames. Hurrying a fire along often caused fires. Mrs. John Pierce received extensive burns about the hands, arms, and face when she threw gasoline on a fire, causing an explosion that engulfed her in flames. Her daughter, Mrs. Civish, quickly smothered the flames. They had been attempting to heat water in boilers on the stove to do the family wash. Quick thinking and a call to the fire company by the daughter saved her mother's life.<sup>6</sup>

Many fires occurred out of range of the hydrant zone and many out of range of telephone

service. At these instances, community and neighbors still did all they could to help out. In April 1915, fire broke out on the roof of the Lindon Ward Meetinghouse, during testimony meeting. The congregation vacated the building in about one minute. Using two ladders and twenty buckets, the members soon conquered the flames and returned to the chapel “singing praises and bearing testimonies.”<sup>7</sup>

During afternoon church meeting on the second Sunday in August, 1915, an alarm sounded in Manila Ward and church hurriedly dismissed. Men, women, and children unitedly worked to save a number of homes and “thousands” of acres of grazing land from fire. Starting at the mouth of American Fork Canyon, the fire rapidly moved south for two miles along the base of Mt. Mahogany. It “came near getting the homes and orchards of Jens and Swen Monson. At times it traveled with the speed of a horse and repeatedly jumped the roadway, only to be put out by the army of men fighting it.” Once it nearly trapped Art Holman. “Finally the wind changed and would have swept the entire mountain side but for the timely rain apparently sent by Providence.”<sup>8</sup> On the parameters of town the in-city fire department remained helpless with no water hydrants available.

In 1921, other spectacular fires occurred on the outreaches of town. A Utah Power and Light barn at the mouth of American Fork Canyon burned, destroying four-and-one-half tons of hay belonging to M. S. Christiansen who lived there and ran the lower power plant. He had burned the cheat grass earlier in the day and after dousing the fire with water he traveled to Lehi. Looking east from Lehi, he saw the fire burning and hurried home to find that the wind had fanned some errant sparks setting his hay ablaze.

Another Sunday fire started at the Lindon five-room brick house of Victor Johnson when he attempted to “burn out the flu” and a spark fell on the roof. Neighbors, seeing the blaze, came to assist, but thinking their efforts futile they rescued the furniture first and then conquered the blaze. “A call was made to the Pleasant Grove fire department, but as there are no hydrants out there, no run was made. Chief Williams, however, went to the fire and gave his assistance.”

Northern Utah County towns often cooperated to fight problem fires. A fire broke out in Robert Welch's hay stack in the rural part of American Fork in 1923. Arriving at the fire, that town's department found they lacked enough hose to reach the fire, so they summoned the Lehi and Pleasant Grove fire departments. After hooking all three hoses together, they still lacked 15 to 20 feet of reaching the fire. A man rushed to the Lehi station for another hose before they could put out the fire. Some thought that a tramp sleeping in the haystack may have started the blaze.<sup>9</sup>

The popularity of cars combined with the excitement of fires caused the council to pass an ordinance in 1923, prohibiting cars from following the hose cart. By then a conversion to horse-power to pull the cart had occurred, and curious onlookers who followed the horse-pulled cart or parked near a fire became subject to arrest. Traffic and parked cars had begun to hamper the department's effectiveness. The hand-pulled hose cart, converted to horse power served the department for fourteen years. Within that time, the volunteer department fought six fires inside the limited fire map area with only a loss of \$1,128.<sup>10</sup>

When WWI government surplus trucks became available for municipal purchase at reasonable prices in 1924, the city acted to secure the town's first motor-driven fire fighting equipment, a one-and-one-half ton truck. They equipped it with a 350 gallons per minute rotary suction pump from the National Pump Company. Firemen donated their time and money and worked nights building a hose bed and a back “running step” onto the truck. “The men helped

themselves, in any store in town, to the bolts, nails, or any thing the merchant had in stock—free of charge.” The merchants seemed “glad to help for the benefit of this great necessity.” Ike Hayes supervised work on the truck in his garage at 90 Main Street, assisted by Chris and Hans Williamson who had their garage at the head of Main Street. All three mechanics served as members of the fire department. They gave it a coat of red paint and had it ready for service by May 1924. Hayes also offered his garage in which to house the fire truck since the city declared their financial inability to put money into a fire house at that time. The Hayes garage hosted the truck for four years. That June of 1924, the city did purchase a siren and firemen's badges at a combined cost of almost \$60.<sup>11</sup>

A year after the fire truck and pump had been readied an unfortunate fire broke out. The Frederick Kopp place in Manila burned, catching aflame from a chicken brooder. The firemen made a record run with the new truck and water was turned down from the canal to the Kopp place. The smaller ditch, filled with leaves and debris from the winter, clogged the large hose and the pump could not draw water. They threw a roll of wire into the ditch to screen the water, but so much time had lapsed that the fire burned out of control. The fire had consumed coops, chickens, and a truck loaded with grain, and badly damaged the roof and interior of the house. The Kopp's house had burned thirteen years earlier. The theory of the pump remained good, although unworkable as this time. At other times irrigation water was unavailable or some ditches too shallow for its use. Another fire in Manila burned chicken coops, sheds, pig pens and a pig, a stack of grain, and forty ton of hay at the home of Peter Jeppson. Although the firemen's response time had only taken ten minutes, they could do little because of inadequate water available in the irrigation ditch. These two fires prompted published rules to follow in case of fire: “1. Call Central at the telephone office and she will notify the fire department; 2. Turn the water into the ditch if no hydrant is available, and see that a large hole is dug in the ditch free from weeds and leaves, so that the suction pump can work, and get your bucket brigade ready to work before the department arrives.”<sup>12</sup>

By 1929, a 25-30 gallon chemical tank, ladders and other equipment had been added. The department consisted of fourteen men. All belonged to the Utah State and the Utah-Juab County firemen's association. Also additional fire hydrants had been added as the water system extended throughout the city. They updated hoses when the city finances allowed. In 1927, four newly installed hydrants extended the fire protection to 600 East 600 North, with others planned.<sup>13</sup> Every new fire hydrant greatly increased the efficiency of the department.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs set aside the year 1927, as Fire Prevention Year. To get a head start, Chief Kemp and his fire-fighting crew inspected the downtown buildings, encouraging property owners to improve potential fire traps. They noted a potential death trap and the men appealed to the city fathers to petition the Alpine School board to move the wood-working shop out of the main high school building into a separate building. A concentration of students in the building with highly combustible materials posed a threat to lives. A separate brick manual arts building was finally completed in the early 1940s. The Great Depression and financial woes of the district contributed to the delay.<sup>14</sup>

A. J. Brimley house on 1100 North just outside the city limits was totally destroyed in December 1928. Hydrants did not quite reach the A. J. Brinley fire and winter weather usually caused havoc with the water sources. A frozen water hydrant on the premises forced the neighbors to carry water a quarter of a mile. Other neighbors saved most of the contents of the house. An overheated stove and a defective flue caused the destruction.<sup>15</sup>

The possibility of fire consuming the entire downtown shopping district became real in 1928. Utility areas and buildings behind stores, i.e., barns, chicken coops, and coal sheds, and collected garbage, all thought a necessary part of the behind-the-scenes downtown district at the time appeared to be hazards. A granary behind Thornton Mercantile and Drug Store caught fire and burned to the ground. Hans Williamson, just passing by, summoned the department whose members acted quickly. Burning rubbish started the blaze. Two months later fire destroyed a shed at the rear of the W. E. Clark store. It had flared up before the fire department had been alerted and a slight wind flamed the fire. If the well-organized fire department had delayed, a number of other buildings could have been destroyed. This, a busy year, when they attended to with nineteen fires.<sup>16</sup>

In April 1928, the Baxter building at the head of Main on Center underwent remodeling to become the first permanent firehouse for the modernized equipment. The city leased the building with an option to buy. Installation of large double doors in the brick facade and a cement ramp leading to the street allowed the fire engine ample space for a quick exit. They partitioned an office in the back of the building for the marshal and night watchman, chairs and a table furnished the main room for meetings.<sup>17</sup>

Where fires were concerned, cooperation between Utah County cities seemed imperative. Firemen helped fight large fires in surrounding cities, and even covered for other towns when several departments helped another. Fires on the border between towns usually received the response of firemen from both towns. For the Peay Dairy's lumber milk house fire, between American Fork and Pleasant Grove on State Street in 1930, both companies responded. Two years before that, September 1928, these two towns had put all their efforts into fighting a range fire in Alpine, which threatened cattle, sheep, houses, sheds and numerous acres. While the towns fought that lengthy fire, a Provo engine accompanied by some of their men stayed in Pleasant Grove on standby, in case a fire broke out in one of the two north county towns. That year, the county began allotting money to towns to compensate for time fire crews spent fighting fires in county areas.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1910, when the fire department was organized, and 1938, when the Sanborn Company made the last fire insurance map of Pleasant Grove, the loss within the fire district reduced to an average of \$65 per year. This figure compared with the \$4,000 to 6,000 per year for the eighteen year map period before the fire department existed, proved the effectiveness of the department. Further, between that same period, business district buildings doubled, a high school, tabernacle, and tithing office had been built, and residences within the map area increased. With this enlarged responsibility the firemen showed a responsible fire coverage.<sup>19</sup>

The firemen weren't always the same men. Numerous men have served the public for many years without pay, in fact they paid yearly dues to belong. Chief Kemp received a small wage of \$10. each year. In 1928, his pay increased to \$25. yearly, after he had served three years into his second appointment as chief.<sup>20</sup> Kemp organized his crew well, each man having his own assigned job. With each new mayor's term came a confirmation of the department members. In 1930, when Mayor Lewis E. Olpin began his term the city council confirmed the following men upon recommendation of Chief Kemp: C. J. Williams, assistant chief; Ike Hayes, secretary-treasurer and mechanic; Hans Williamson, mechanic; J. D. Thorne, fire police; Ray Frampton, electrician; C. R. Clark and H. R. Nelson, nozzle-men; H. N. Thorne and Raymond Nelson, hydrant-men; Alton Clark and J. LeRoy Thorne, firemen. Most of these men worked or lived near the downtown area within a block or two of the station.<sup>21</sup>

In 1933 the city purchased a new model Dodge fire truck with a 350 gallon pumper and a 110 gallon booster tank. They sold the 1924 rebuilt truck to an Oregon town. Along with the truck, they purchased partial uniforms for the firemen at a cost of \$2.38 each for caps, and coats at \$3.37 each.<sup>22</sup>

Firemen led an exciting and adventuresome life, never knowing just what to expect when they left the station for a fire. Most of the time it would be serious, and once in a while a bit comical, like the time in 1936 when Annie Holman's car made so much smoke that the neighbors turned in an alarm. And then there was the bizarre incident of a brother of the fire victim being arrested for arson. It seems the deceased mother of the two men left the house to the arsonist's brother. Dissatisfied, the unhappy brother crawled through a basement window and set the house afire. In doing so, he lost a button with a piece of his coat attached—the convicting evidence.<sup>23</sup>

With the building of the new city hall on Main Street in 1940, they built a new firehouse. onto the back of the building facing east onto a wide alleyway that exited onto Center Street. In conjunction with the Civil Defense Department, a new and much louder siren became part of the building complex.

The first summons sounded by the new siren called all firemen to a fire above the Fred Scholes and Jack McFarlane orchards that burned over five acres. Out of reach of water, the firemen fought it unsuccessfully with wet gunny sacks and an “Indian pump.” Uncontrolled, the fire digressed onto Forest Service land and then the CCC boys were called to assist. In late November 1940 another hard-to-control fire destroyed a \$35,000 crane at the Warren Concrete Pipe Plant after 150 gallons of gas exploded, the greatest property damage to date in Pleasant Grove. The fire department fought the blaze with the aide of a booster tank and 800 feet of two- and one-half inch hose.<sup>24</sup>

At the completion of the new community complex, the city put Chief Kemp on a salary of \$720 yearly and provided him with an apartment above the fire house. At the same time the librarian's salary was \$540 yearly. This full time paid chief resulted in the nearest Pleasant Grove had come to a paid fire department. Kemp and his wife lived there in readiness for fire calls until Hoyt and Cleone Shields took the position in 1948-49. Then others followed, Bill and Velma Robbins and Wesley and Roena Fillerups. Clara Edwards succeeded the Fillerups in the firehouse apartment. As others had before her, she took the fire calls, received the particulars and addresses of the fires and relayed them by phone after sounding the siren.<sup>25</sup>

In 1942 the department made more progress through volunteer groups who cooperated to secure new life-saving equipment. The town's Chamber of Commerce, Parent Teachers Association, and the Fire Department solicited funds to purchase a resuscitator. Together they raised \$450, and had enough money left for three wool blankets. Through the years this new innovation restored breathing to many. Victims of near drowning, a father and son were revived after rescue from a ditch. Also, victims of electric shock received treatment, and as did children whose breathing had stopped as a result of diseases. Firemen themselves had need of the machine when overcome by smoke inhalation. Dr. Anderson called the firemen to the American Fork Hospital numerous times to use the resuscitator to revive new born babies and heart patients. Firemen kept continually updated on the newest methods of first aid and the use of the resuscitator.<sup>26</sup> More new equipment helped.

On July 1, 1949, a new fire truck arrived, a Ford F-7 with a 500 gallon pumper and 500 gallon booster tank and a Myers high-pressure pump with 800 pounds pressure for fog work. They kept the 1933 Dodge. The Junior Chamber of Commerce, Jaycees and others had made many public

appeals for donations to purchase a second truck, reasoning that one truck would be inadequate to cover the territory, including Manila and Lindon. And with just one truck protecting them, citizens' fire insurances had soared. Collections for the second engine may have increased after a \$15,000 fire at Lindon Elementary in December 1948, but the total donations only amounted to \$3,500 of the \$12,000 cost of the truck.

The year following the truck purchase, fire hydrants had increased to forty with six stand pipes throughout the town. The fire chief worked closely with Harold Smith, Chairman of Public Safety, who monitored and informed the public about possible fire hazards. The men held drills every other Monday to prepare for emergencies. Before 1949, there had been an average of one call a month. In 1953, the department answered thirty-eight calls, eleven of those in the county.

On January 3, 1954, one man died while helping fight a fire. The firemen used four tanks of oxygen in an attempt to revive him. This became the first fire-fighter fatality.

A factory-ordered, 350 horsepower American LaFrance, with 1250 gallons pumping capacity, arrived in early 1959, touted as the finest fire engine in the world, and by far the largest of Pleasant Grove's equipment to date. The down payment, \$3,400, with four yearly payments of \$2,720 each, amounting to a cost of \$19,448, with interest.<sup>27</sup> (After Pleasant Grove had outgrown the usefulness of this engine, they gave it to Salem City volunteer department.)

At the organization of the first fire departments, each town designed its own nozzles, hydrants, and hose couplings out of what they could find to fit their needs, buying from a variety of companies. Commercial outlets made their own fittings with a different number of threads. Most towns in Utah eventually adopted the Salt Lake City type, with six threads per inch. In the 1950s legislation standardized fire fighting equipment with seven and one-half threads per inch. The new Pleasant Grove equipment had been adapters to make hoses fit onto hydrants and nozzles of older equipment. The situation "created a state of confusion that was enough to drive firemen crazy when they were under the pressure of seeing a resident's house burn," wrote Harold Smith. With the arrival of the new American-LaFrance, in 1959, which had national standard threads, "such a condition was intolerable." So the water department, responsible for the care of the fire hydrants, had every hydrant converted to the national standard thread. This affected the fruit growers as well, for many of them purchased city water, filling their spray tanks from fire hydrants when irrigation water ran low. The farmers then had to have their hoses inspected by the city before connecting to any fire plug.<sup>28</sup>

Williamson's garage at the head of Main Street became the next firehouse when equipment outgrew the station behind the Main Street city hall. The city purchased the building, at 10 West Center and, building materials for remodeling in 1958. Thirty-six firemen and interested citizens completely gutted the structure, replaced the wood floor with concrete, and partitioned the building into a 1,500 square-foot engine room, a 1,000 square-foot recreation and meeting room, two rest rooms and an ultra-modern kitchen. The south facade received a brick face and two large overhead doors. The long building proved big enough to share with the sewer and water department, and provided storage, and a utility shop until 1968. Through the years the city fathers have looked for good buys in trucks and have updated their equipment and fire stations in order to serve the public and keep down the cost of insurance rates within the city limits, based on the pumping capacity of a town's fire department.

Keeping up with the need for new fire equipment, the city purchased 1963 Dodge pumper

truck. In 1992 that truck was replaced with a used 1985 Chevrolet brush truck. The Bureau of Land Management made the truck available to the city at a large savings over a new truck. It more than tripled the capacity of the 1963 truck, and could pump from a ditch, tanker, or hydrant.

The City purchased a new fire truck in 1988, with a pumping capacity of 1500 gallons per minute and with a 750 gallon tank. The 475 horsepower motor climbs hills rapidly for quicker response. Those who had gone to the factory to drive it to Utah coincidentally, arrived in town just as a house fire was in progress.

With the purchase of that new fire truck, firefighting vehicles increased beyond the capacity of the two-engine firehouse on Center. The city purchased the old high school shop and lunch room complex, built in 1940, from Alpine School District for \$180,000. The city appropriated another \$50,000 for renovating to create the facility into a station. Since 1990, the city projected that additional amounts will go into long range changes, although, much of the work is donated. The five-bay facility with ten overhead doors house the Fire Department and the Ambulance Department, with the lower level being utilized by the Parks Department. The building, dedicated at the time of the community fair in September 1988, is located at 100 East 100 South.

In 1994, the city added two new trucks to one existing pumper truck, two brush trucks, and one tanker. One of the new trucks, a pumper truck, the other an eighty-five foot snorkel-type for higher buildings and fighting fires from above. The snorkel, the town's first, was purchased from Provo with a substantial savings to the tax payers. That year the department responded to 160 calls in an average response time of less than fourteen minutes. Equipment has been updated on the average of every twenty to thirty years. The number of trucks increased to three pumper trucks, two brush trucks and one tanker, had prepared them for any type of fire. The Alpine Canyon blaze and the Mahogany Mountain fire of 1992, both fires of long duration and extensive damage, pointed up the need for the two brush trucks. With the city's growth, volunteer firemen have also increased to thirty. Approximately thirteen men respond to each call.

At the Birthday fair in 1995, service awards were given to eight volunteer firemen for laying their lives on the line. They had rendered a combined 286 years of service. This is not the first such award. Being a Pleasant Grove fireman, is like being a fire horse—every time the siren goes off, they run. For these men it is in their blood and through the years they have donated the better part of their adult lives to that volunteer service. Their donated service is not just to their own community, but to neighboring communities of Lindon and for a time the new city of Cedar Hills have been served by the department. Through these many hours the men have saved millions of dollars in property and fire insurance.

Until 1 November 1998 the members of the Pleasant Grove Volunteer Fire Department have elected their own chief and officers, and each officer as well as firemen served without pay. As a group the department built an excellent reputation of dedication to duty, earning the citizens' esteem. The city council chose to hire a full-time fire chief in October of that year. They hired Mark Hales to fill that position of full-time, paid fire chief, a first since Kemp served as fire chief of Pleasant Grove fire department. At this time the council chose to merge the EMT or first response rescue department with the firefighters since they work so closely together. Two volunteer EMTs were elevated to paid positions.<sup>29</sup>

## Firemen's Auxiliary

From the beginning the firemen enjoyed their associations and bonded socially, often having dinners and social gatherings with their wives. Being young and vigorous men, they formed a basketball team and in 1916 arranged to play BYU and U of U. The later they beat forty-two to twenty-six.<sup>30</sup> Their responsibilities combined with their fun brought about a new organization.

The firemen's wives were tired of having their husbands leave every second and fourth Monday evening for drill. So on October 17, 1958, the wives met in the Main Street city hall and formed the Pleasant Grove Firemen's Auxiliary. Utah State Firemen's Auxiliary officers met with the wives to help draw the bylaws. The organization began with Maxine West as president, Velma Robbins, vice president, and Naomi Keetch, secretary/treasurer. Williams' garage at the head of Main Street was then under consideration for remodeling. The women pitched in, holding candy and bake sales and other projects to finance the furnishings for the meeting room—a refrigerator, an electric range, and of course the feminine touch of curtains. The auxiliary became a service organization.

These auxiliary women could see that their long-term philanthropic goals would need a stronger money-raising base. Naomi Keetch and Velma Robison proposed the idea of a Fireman and Auxiliary Breakfast, and they were elected chairmen of the event. To access the feasibility of the idea, they polled the businessmen, finding an overwhelming positive response.

On Saturday 28 May 1960, they held their first breakfast. The event, attended by 600 hungry people, was a huge success and grew into an annual affair. Several other features of the annual breakfast became traditional. The women sewed red striped aprons for both the firemen and themselves—now the trademark of the breakfast. As then, a traditional menu is still served, consisting of pancakes, hash browns, eggs, ham, coffee, chocolate milk, milk, and juice. A drawing-card for the event is that the proceeds go back into community needs.

The ever increasing popularity of the breakfast allows the auxiliary financial freedom to provide fire education in the schools and donate to many good causes. Some are: Veterans Memorial Swimming Pool, a new ambulance, oxygen masks and other fire-fighting and prevention equipment, high school band uniforms, girls and boys state, rental wheel chairs and senior citizen care, and support of women's organizations—Utah County Women's Crisis Center, Mother of the Year, and Daughters of Utah Pioneers. In memory of the men who lost their lives in Vietnam, they donated books to the city library and planted trees at the Veterans Memorial Swimming Pool. During the recent years they have been making quilts and donating money to the Intermountain Burn Center and the proposed adventure park. Former Mayor David Holdaway stated that "The Firemen and Auxiliary Breakfast is the largest social gathering we have in Pleasant Grove." Attending crowds had grown to 2,036 in 1996.<sup>31</sup>

In 1985, the Firemen's Auxiliary received a \$25,000 grant to promote fire awareness and safety. With the money and in conjunction with the firemen, they began an aggressive fire prevention program. After writing a curriculum, they took their program into Pleasant Grove schools—from play school to grade twelve. They teach by way of a video tape and "Sparkey," a talking fire hydrant. This program proved so successful they were asked to share it with the state-wide PTA. They also taught safety to adult groups of the town, gave 500 free smoke detectors to low-income families, and sold numerous fire extinguishers at cost—all this during a period of three

or four years. In 2000 they continue taking a prevention program into schools. Elementary students are now nominated for fire chief of the week. One name is drawn from a hat to be the lucky elementary school child who gets to sit on the fire truck, wear a fireman's helmet or hold the hose.<sup>32</sup> The consensus of the firemen is that an education program cuts down fires.

#### Pleasant Grove Auxiliary Police and Ambulance Crew

Up to the 1960s firemen, police, and doctors had the responsibility to answer emergency calls. With increasing services needed, the auxiliary policemen organized an emergency medical unit. In 1961, four of the first auxiliary members, Cecil Huntsman, Don Gurney, Dale Thomas, and Keith Bills went to Nevada to pick up Pleasant Grove City's first ambulance, a converted hearse purchased from Seaside, Oregon. It was partially equipped for emergency runs to the hospitals with red lights, a stretcher, and portable oxygen. The auxiliary added a respirator, blankets, sheets, pillows, and first aid equipment. The auxiliary borrowed the money to purchase the ambulance from the city, paying them back with volunteer service.<sup>33</sup>

The Pleasant Grove Ambulance Association officially formed in 1975, with the goal to render life-saving emergency service when needed and increase the public's knowledge of first aid and CPR. Eight years later twenty-two volunteer members constituted the group, each a certified Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) with extensive training, 1,800 hours each year. In 1983 they had the highest number of level III EMTs within the state, certified to use limited medications and start IV when needed. They worked in teams and one level III EMT accompanies each team and operated two ambulances, one first line and one backup. During the month of August 1983, they made twenty-five runs, twenty-two of those calls during an eighteen day period. At that time Paul Topham had been with the association since its inception.<sup>34</sup>

The volunteer ambulance department has the same response time with an equally good reputation as the fire crew. In 1994 they had several new ambulances with an established policy to replace their equipment every five years. That year ambulance crew responded to 800 calls, collecting a fee for their services repays the cost of updating equipment. The two ready units are manned by mostly city employees who are available and trained, and who are paid \$5.50 an hour for their services. They voluntarily have saved hundreds of lives.

## Endnotes

1. Andrew Jenson, Pleasant Grove Manuscript History, LDS Church Office Building, Salt Lake City; *Deseret News*, February 7, 1871.
2. Ike Hayes, "Fire Department History," DUP Histories, I:83; Sandborn Maps, Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City; Pleasant Grove City Council Meeting Minutes, 17 February 1903 (hereafter cited as Council Minutes).
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4. *Pleasant Grove News*, 11 March 1910.
5. Council Minutes, 20 December 1906, 4 February 1907, 25 January 1908, 20 December 1909, 17 January, 21 February 1910, 11 May, 6 July 1914; Hayes, "Fire Department History"
6. Council Minutes, 24 March, 14 August, 2 October 1915, 14 October 1916.
7. Council Minutes, 13 March 1915.
8. Council Minutes, 21 August 1915.
9. Council Minutes, 15 December 1923.
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14. *Citizen*, 13 February 1926,
15. *Citizen*, 8 December 1928.
16. *Citizen*, 7 April, 30 June 1928, 6 April 1929.
17. *Citizen*, 28 April 1928.
18. *Citizen*, 22 June 1928; Pleasant Grove Fire Department Minutes and Log, Pleasant Grove Fire Station.
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24. *Review*, 29 November 1940.
25. Fire Department Log; *Review*, 1 January 1943.
26. Resuscitator Records, 1942-1947, Pleasant Grove Fire station.
27. American-LaFrance Corporation manual, CLG files.
28. *Review*, 12 March 1959.
29. *Review*, 9 December 1998.
30. *Citizen* 16 June 1915, 15, 29 June, 18 November 1916.
31. Naomi S. Keetch, "The Pleasant Grove Firemen Auxiliary Breakfast (typescript), Pleasant Grove CLG Files.
32. Portions of information for the Pleasant Grove Fire Department and the Fireman's Auxiliary were taken from the Auxiliary scrapbook. News items without documentation are apart of their organized collections.
33. Cecil Huntsman interview, 30 August 1993, by Mildred B. Sutch, CLG Files.
34. *Review*, 8 September 1983.