

Why Portland Fire's Truck Companies Were Numbered The Way They Were

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If you know anything about Portland Fire's Truck Companies over the past century and a half, you'll know that the numbers have been a sometimes strange mix in relation to Engine Companies. Since 1984, they have matched the Engine Company with which they are stationed. But that wasn't always the case. Why? Because they received a number and placement in the order they came into service (mostly), which was at a different pace than the Engine Companies. Is there a way to make sense of it? Sure, read on...

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It all started on an August day in 1853. Vigilance Hook and Ladder #1 was approved to begin providing service to the city of Portland on the evening of August 1, 1853. The following day, August 2nd, they would begin protecting Portland. Four days later, Willamette Engine Company #1 would do the same, but they would not be located in the same station. For the next 131 years, Engine and Truck company numbers would generally differ...until a consolidation with Fire District #10 in east Multnomah County would prompt a more orderly system where all apparatus within a station would share the same number (Engine, Truck, Rescue, Brush Unit, Fireboat, etc.).

Vigilance Hook & Ladder Company #1 would remain the only Truck Company to serve Portland through the 30 years of the Portland Volunteer Fire Department. But things began to change within a few years after the volunteer era ended.

In 1883, when the Portland Volunteer Fire Department would become the Portland Paid Fire Department (although still mostly volunteer), Willamette Engine Company #1 would become Engine 1, Multnomah Engine Company #2 would become Engine 2, Columbian Engine Company #3 would become Engine 3, Protection Engine Company #4 would become Engine 4, and Vigilance Hook and Ladder #1 would become Truck 1. Tiger Engine Company #5 and Couch Engine Company #6 would simply roll into one of the other Engine crews and it would be a few years before additional Engine Companies would be added to the roster.

There would not be a second Truck Company until 1888, and it was not housed with Engine 2 just because it was named Truck 2. The various Truck Companies would begin their service in the following years:

- Truck 1 in 1883 (1853 as Vigilance)
- Truck 2 in 1888
- Truck 3 in 1891
- Truck 4 in 1895
- Truck 5 in 1891
- Truck 6 in 1928
- Truck 7 in 1928
- Truck 8 in 1939
- Truck 9 in 1960
- Truck 10 in 1959

Further, in 1883, Engine and Truck Companies would be stationed at the following addresses:

- Truck - 720 SW 4th Avenue.
- Engine 1 - 100 block of SW Morrison.
- Engine 2 - 221 SW 2nd Avenue.
- Engine 3 - 200 block of SW Washington (moving a year later to 1440 SW Washington)
- Engine 4 - 1233 SW 1st Avenue.

Along with Engine and Truck Companies, there were Hose Companies, Chemical Companies, etc. This story won't go that deep. But here are the stories of the Truck Companies.

Truck 1 would co-locate with Engine 1 from 1891 to 1948. But in 1948, Truck 1 would be moved to 221 SW 2nd Avenue (Engine 2 was no longer there and had been replaced by Engine 21 in 1921) to be co-located with Engine 21 until 1950. Then, both Engine 21 and Truck 1 moved into the new Central Fire Station at 55 SW Ash Street.

Truck 2 would come onto the scene in 1888 and be placed with Engine 4 at 1724 SW 4th Avenue. They would remain together until 1960 when they would both move to their current location at 511 SW College Street.

Truck 3 came to be in 1891 but was a single company until 1925 when Engine 3 would move in with them at 1425 NW Glisan Street. As a rare exception, they were the only Engine/Truck combo that carried matching numbers from the beginning of their relationship until today.

Truck 4 would begin in 1895 at 420 NE Holladay Street. It too was a lone company but was partnered with Engine 7 when it moved to 1035 SE Stark Street in 1907. Engine 7 and Truck 4 would remain together until the station closed in 1975 and Engine 7 would move to 5 SE Madison Street and Truck 4 would move to Station 23 at 2915 SE 13th Place.

Truck 5 began in 1891 with Engine 8 at the 2600 Block of N. Borthwick Avenue. Engine 8 would be sent to 45 NE Russell Street in 1903 and Truck 5 would join them in 1907. They would remain until the new station was built at 7134 N Maryland Street in 1960.

Truck 6 began in 1928 and was given a home with Engine 9 at 900 SE 35th Avenue. It would remain until 1963 when it would join Engine 19 at 7301 E. Burnside Street. In 1984, Truck 6 became Truck 19 for a very short time, then was permanently closed and was re-constituted as Squad 19 (which only lasted one year).

Truck 7 also began in 1928, but at the other end of town at 5340 N. Interstate Avenue. It was co-located with Engine 24. They would remain there until 1959 when the new station was built at 4515 N. Maryland Street.

Truck 8 would begin service in 1939 at 1436 SW Montgomery Street. It replaced Engine 16 at that location and served alone until 1948 when Engine 1 was co-located there. Truck 8 would move on in 1960 to 1505 SW DeWitt Street and be housed with Engine 5. Engine 1 would stay at the station on

Montgomery until 1963 when the station closed. Engine 1 would cease to exist until 1984 when the reassignment of numbers due to the Fire District #10 merger would reestablish Engine 1.

Truck 9 would begin in 1960 at 7205 N Alta Avenue in St. Johns. It arrived in 1960, 6 years after Engine 32 moved from the basement of the St. Johns City Hall Building to the newly built station at 7205 N. Alta Avenue. Engine 32 was changed to Engine 22 in 1960 and the two companies served together until their numbers would be paired in 1984.

Truck 10 would begin service in 1959 when the new station opened at 5111 SE Mall Street, with Engine 25 moving from its previous home at 3550 SE Francis Street. In 1984, their numbers would be paired.

On July 1, 1984, all of Fire District #10 was blended with Portland Fire when the two departments consolidated their service delivery, becoming one large fire department. Fire District #10 brought ten fire stations and accompanying apparatus with their own numbering system to the newly blended fire department. It was decided that a renumbering scheme, having all apparatus within a fire station be numbered the same, should be instituted.

Renumbering fire stations was not a one-time thing. It has happened at different times over the past decades, typically in an effort to fill blank numbers left by station closures or city growth issues.

The number shown on the front, side, or back of a fire engine is a name, an identity, even a measure of the heritage of that Fire Company. To many, it may be just a number. To the Firefighters of Portland, it is family and heritage.

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