

# Portland Firefighter Memorial Plaza News

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*The Portland Firefighter Memorial Plaza is a place of tribute to Fallen Fire Chief David Campbell combined with a memorial wall sharing the names of all Portland Firefighters who have given their lives in service. The public plaza will be a place of remembrance, reflection, and interpretation of the vigilance of Portland Fire & Rescue's service to Portland.*

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## Dates of Importance

June 26, 1911—This date marks the 112th anniversary of the death of Fire Chief David Campbell. David Campbell was 6th of 76 Portland Firefighters to die in service to the citizens of Portland. His death is used as the date on which Portland Fire remembers Chief Campbell and all of Portland's Fallen Firefighters.

## “Fire At The May Apartments”

This was the headline of local news in Portland on May 16, 2023. But it could also have been the headline news on June 15, 1921. That is the infamous day when Lieutenant Karl Gunster would lose his life in a fire at.....the May Apartments.

The fire that took Karl's life began in some oily rags in the basement of the May Apartments. The resulting fire travelled through an unprotected dumbwaiter shaft and spread throughout all floors of the building. This allowed the fire to achieve dangerous proportions that effected every part of the building.

Karl and his crew used ladders to enter a third floor window. Karl was quickly overcome by smoke. A firefighter from Engine 3 found Karl unconscious and was able to drag him to a window where other crew members brought him down a ladder to the ground. Crews were unable to resuscitate him. Four

other firefighters would be injured, along with three civilians.

The recent fire was similar in nature, but was reportedly started by a resident of the May Apartments. The fire spread throughout the building, just as it had in 1921. Injuries were few and no one died in the fire, thanks to the quick and efficient work of Portland Firefighters.

Karl Gunster would become the 11th Portland Firefighter to die in service to



the citizens of Portland. His sacrifice earned him a spot on the Fallen Firefighter Memorial, a distinction no firefighter wants. In 1927, Karl would also have a fireboat (*The Karl Gunster*) named for him. This is a rare honor that speaks to the reputation he had among fellow firefighters. Karl was also the sitting President of the

Portland Firefighters Association. At the time of his death, Karl was 41 years old and was survived by his wife.

## The David Campbell Memorial Service

On Monday, June 26, 2023 at 10:00 AM, the David Campbell Memorial, located on SW Alder Street, between SW 18th and 19th Avenues, will again play host to the annual remembrance of Portland's Fallen Firefighters. The event will find Portland Firefighters honoring their own with the Portland

Fire Honor Guard, the Portland Fire Fighters Pipes and Drums Band, and special presentations by Fire Chief Sara Boone, Fire Commissioner Gonzalez' office, the Portland Firefighters Association, and the David Campbell Memorial Association. The public is invited to share this moment and pay their respects alongside Portland Fire.

[www.DavidCampbellMemorial.org](http://www.DavidCampbellMemorial.org)

“David Campbell Memorial Association” on Facebook

# David Campbell Memorial Service

June 26, 2023 will mark the 112th anniversary of the day Fire Chief David Campbell died in the Union Oil Fire. The tragedy shook the Portland Community and the ripple effects spread across the nation. New regulations regarding oil tanks within the city limits would be passed, but it all came too late to save the life of the popular and capable Fire Chief of Portland.

The community responded to Chief Campbell's death with immediacy and determination. A funeral was arranged for Riverview Cemetery. The funeral procession that carried Chief Campbell to his gravesite began at the Portland Elks Lodge (SW 7th and Stark Street), and moved through the streets of Portland to his grave site. It was reported that 150,000 Portlanders lined the streets to bid Chief Campbell farewell.

Portlanders wanted to honor Chief Campbell but there was division on exactly what that honor would be. Donations had been coming in with this intention. One idea would be best summed up by George H. Himes, registrar of the Oregon Historical Society and a close friend of Chief Campbell:

*"In view of the appalling death of Fire Chief David Campbell, while in the line of duty, it certainly is timely for the citizens of Portland to consider erecting a monument to his memory. The best monument to David Campbell and the one that would appeal to him more strongly than a monument of any other form, if his unrecognizable lips could speak, would be the creation of a irreducible fund, the interest on which to be used for the relief of firemen and their families. There is a strong reason why this should be done. The life of a fireman is extra hazardous and hence he cannot get any life insurance. The call should be for not less than \$250,000, an average of \$1 apiece for the present population of Portland. I would nominate the daily newspapers of this city as a commission to carry out this project."*



While Campbell's death did not result in a "fund," it did create community donations. It was decided the funds should go toward a physical monument in his honor. A plan was put in place and the funds created what we know today as the *David Campbell Memorial*, located on SW Alder Street between SW 18th and 19th Avenues. Since its completion on June 26, 1928, most of the annual services have been held at this site (exceptions occurred during the pandemic and during street construction). At some point after completion, the names of other Fallen Firefighters would be added to the memorial floor. However, this was never an adequate tribute. Today, the David Campbell Memorial Association endeavors to build a proper tribute to all 76 Portland Firefighters who have given their lives in service, in a way that complements the David Campbell Memorial.

## To Learn More...

The development of the Portland Firefighter Memorial Plaza continues to grow and evolve. You can find additional information on the "David Campbell Memorial Association" Facebook Page. This also includes ways in which you can support this project and bring honor, recognition, and remembrance to all of Portland's Fallen Firefighters.

The David Campbell Memorial Association web site is another source of information. Find it at [DavidCampbellMemorial.org](http://DavidCampbellMemorial.org). And to speak to a member of the David Campbell Memorial Association, contact Don Porth, President, 503-805-8482 or [Don@PreventThink.com](mailto:Don@PreventThink.com)



**DAVID CAMPBELL  
MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION**