



Printer Friendly Version Sponsored by: King County Library

**HistoryLink File #3938**

## **Seattle Fire Department is created on October 17, 1889.**

On October 17, 1889, the Seattle Fire Department is officially created, a few months after Seattle's devastating Great Fire of June 6, 1889. Gardner Kellogg, who had been a volunteer firefighter since 1870, is named the Department's first chief.

Seattle's first firefighters belonged to the Seattle Hook and Ladder Company, which began in 1870, but disbanded a year later due to lack of fires as well as funds. Within a few years, a group of citizens formed Seattle Engine Company No. 1, which was paid for by subscription. Kellogg was chosen as Chief of the volunteers. Hose and a hose-reel were borrowed from the Port Gamble Fire Department, and a used, hand-operated pump engine was brought in from Sacramento, California.

On April 11, 1884, the City of Seattle passed an ordinance taking control of the volunteer department. By this time the group had two steam-powered fire engines and a ladder truck. In 1888, Josiah Collins replaced Kellogg as Chief.

### **The Great Fire**

On June 6, 1889, the Great Seattle Fire broke out in Victor Clairmont's cabinet shop at the corner of Front (1st Avenue) and Madison streets. The flames quickly spread and the small group of volunteer firefighters quickly exhausted the town's small and private water systems. By the end of the day, 64 acres of homes and businesses lay in ruins.

Insurance investigators charged the city with having an inadequate water supply and an inadequate fire department. Firefighters were described as being poorly trained, and most of them quit in disgust at the charges. Chief Collins was among those who resigned.

In response, the city authorized the creation of a paid, professional fire department, which was passed by ordinance on October 17, 1889. Three days later Gardner Kellogg was selected as Chief, and 32 men were hired.

Since the old fire houses had been destroyed in the fire, the new fire department was housed in temporary structures that had leaky canvas roofs. During the winter, many men and horses fell ill, until the first new station was opened the following summer.

## Sources:

Glen W. Garvie, *Seattle Fire Department Centennial: 1889-1989* (Portland, Oregon: Taylor Publishing Company, 1989), 36-39. By Alan J. Stein, September 02, 2002



Engine No, 1, Seattle Volunteer fire Department, July 23, 1883

*Photo by Theodore Peiser, Courtesy UW Special Collections (Neg. ACurtis28463)*



Hose team, Engine Company No. 1, Seattle, ca. 1889

*Courtesy UW Special Collections (Neg. SEA1237)*



Seattle's first steam fire engine, 1879

*Courtesy J. Willis Sayre, This City of Ours*

## Related Topics:

- Government & Politics
- Infrastructure

---

**Licensing:** This essay is licensed under a Creative Commons license that encourages reproduction with attribution. Credit should be given to both HistoryLink.org and to the author, and sources must be included with any reproduction. Click the icon for more info. Please note that this Creative Commons license applies to text only, and not to images. For more information regarding individual photos or images, please contact the source noted in the image credit.

