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# THE FIRE DISTRICTS of KING COUNTY



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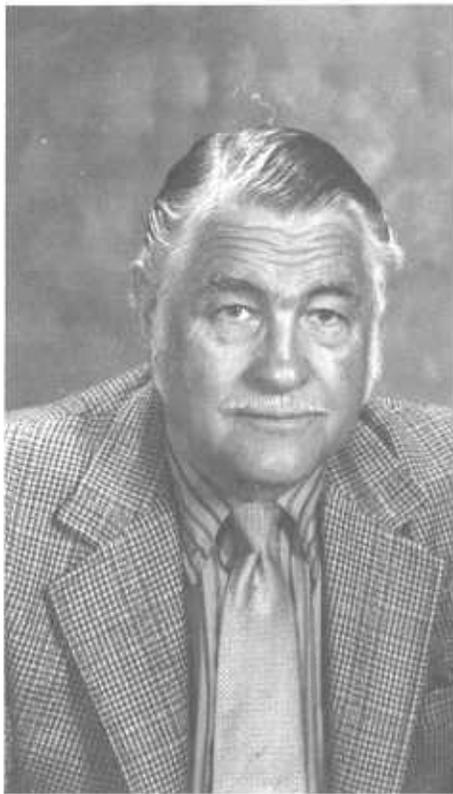
By  
*Harold "Jiggs" Hoyt*



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"Jiggs" is not a trained writer. What you read is "Jiggs" himself narrating the history of King County's fire service. The sincerity of this work is something we can all appreciate, and if reading these lines evokes visions of the past or brings to mind a face long forgotten, then the purpose of this book will be fulfilled.

Dick Landis  
Jiggs Hoyt



*Harold "Jiggs" Hoyt*

#### HAROLD "JIGGS" HOYT

Harold "Jiggs" Hoyt, a native son of Seattle, now lives nine miles south of where he was born on Beacon Hill. Jiggs is a 45-year residence of the Skyway area of King County Fire District #20 and associated for 40 years as both a fireman and commissioner with the District. He began earning his livelihood in 1933 on the Seattle waterfront and later as a businessman in the Skyway area.

"Jiggs" the author of two well-received local history books of the Bryn Mawr and Skyway areas explained the structure of King County Fire District #20 in the community. Chief Ron Haworth and Secretary Lin Hanson of Fire District 10 agreed that a history of the King County Fire Districts was needed, this led to the writing of this journal.

# FIRE DISTRICT 20 Bryn Mawr

Captain Renton found coal on the shores of the Black River near the settlement of Earlington. It was mined and shipped by scow to Elliot Bay to be loaded aboard ships to San Francisco. The Welsh miner started to dig holes in all of the hillsides in the area. Some of the miners were working the hills at the southeast corner of Lake Washington and called the area Bryn Mawr which means "Great Hill" in Welsh.

The first development in the area was in 1872 when a couple of prospectors staked land claims. A developer by the name of William Parker saw the potential, purchased the land, and platted the area in 1890 as Bryn Mawr. In 1895, the Rainier Valley Streetcar Railway, on its way to Renton, made a stop at the village of Bryn Mawr. By 1915, the village grew to the point that a number of community-minded citizens formed the Bryn Mawr Civic Club and endeavored to make life a little better for all.

From time to time there were fires that did a complete job as there was no equipment or water available. After a very large fire burned the local grocery store to the foundation, the Civic Club decided there must be a way to take care of the problem. They found the solution in 1933 when the state legislature passed a bill allowing water districts to set up a fire department and buy equipment by tax assessment. The Civic Club talked with the Water Commissioners at the next meeting. The Water Department promised they would install 12 hydrants (stand pipes) and get a hose cart. The

appointed Chief, Hayden Hughes, hung the hose reel from the rafters of his garage. On calls he would drop it into the back of his pickup. The Civic Club was satisfied for awhile, until another fire occurred in 1936 that wiped out another building. The Civic Club was back demanding the Water Department get a motorized piece of equipment.

The Commissioners hunted for something they could afford. They found it in Kent. In 1940, Kent Chief Brick Bridges had a 1924 Howard-Cooper pumper he was surplus for \$900.00. The Water Department, with a crew of volunteers went to inspect it the next day. They drove it back to Bryn Mawr the same day. There was no building, so for the present a tarp would do. Within a week, the volunteers got together and constructed a combination water office and station, all built with community labor and some community money.

Hayden Hughes retained the job of Chief/Manager of Water District 25 until King County Fire District 20 was formed in 1943 by a vote of 53 for and only 5 against. The first three Commissioners were Ross Clark, Scotty Walls and Chuck Curtis. Alex Edmund a local accountant, was appointed Secretary. Hughes was appointed the first Fire District Chief. Chief Hughes was kept busy ordering a Seagrave pumper and building a station to house it. To finance the new equipment and building, the District issued \$18,000 worth of warrants and the U.S. government kicked in \$11,000. Hughes held



*1924 four-cylinder 350 GPM Howard Cooper pumper purchased from the Kent Fire Department in 1940 by the Bryn Mawr Water District 24 for \$900. King County Fire District 20 purchased it from the Water District in 1944 for \$1.*

*Photos courtesy of King County Fire District 20*



*1944 Seagrave Pumper*

the job until 1944 when Scotty Walls resigned as Commissioner to become Chief and Hughes filled the Commissioner's job. The Seagrave was delivered on June 6, 1944, at the cost of \$7,625, fully equipped. The old Howard-Cooper was moved out of the Water Department garage and covered with a tarp. The new Seagrave moved in until January 1946 when the new brick station was finished. When the Seagrave was backed into the new station, the Howard-Cooper was behind it. The Fire Commissioners talked to the Water Commissioners and made a deal. The Fire Department would take the Howard-Cooper off the hands of the Water Department for \$1.

In 1945, Scotty Walls was still Chief and Hayden Hughes became the Assistant Chief. A new face appeared on the scene, Frank Longo, a volunteer, who was appointed Captain. In 1946, Hughes was back as Fire Chief and Walls filled in as Commissioner and Longo became Assistant Chief. Toward the end of the year, Walls resigned the Commissioner's job and accepted the Assistant Chief's job with the City of Renton under Floyd Lawrence. Longo was appointed to the Board to fill Wall's position until November 1947. One of the Commissioners, Charles Curtis, resigned on account of business and Chief Hughes filled the job until late 1947. Longo was appointed Chief and filled the job until he became ill in 1970. It seems some reference has been made to musical chairs some place in this history book, but the one in Bryn Mawr seems to be the best.

The sparse location of hydrants in the District made it necessary to get a movable source of water. In 1945, Chief Scotty Walls found a 1-1/2-ton GMC chassis at Fort Lewis and began work on it to fill the water void. Scotty scrounged, borrowed parts and the volunteers worked and finished the combination 750-gallon tanker/engine in the fall of 1945. This vehicle served until 1957 when it was surplused. It was sold to Larry's Truck for \$475 in 1963, but before

Larry got his hands on the tanker, it was put to work. On a Sunday morning in Kenndale it assisted firefighting operations at the large Barbee Mill plant fire. There was plenty of help. Units from Renton, Kenndale, Burien, Bellevue, Spring Glen, Mercer Island, Lakeside, White Center and Issaquah got into the act and spent the afternoon pumping water from the lake.

The Bryn Mawr Women's Club wanted to do something for the Fire Department. In 1948, they took up a collection to purchase an Emerson resuscitator and a metal box of bandages. The Department was in the first aid business and over the years the equipment saved two lives. The ladies always had an eye on the boys, so in 1971 they purchased a clam shell stretcher that was put to good use. These two items were just a couple of the many items the community activists presented to the Department through the years.

Hayden Hughes moved out of the area in 1948 and the Board appointed Dale Merrit to fill the vacancy. Dale and his family answered the fire phone for a long time. Dale was active in the King County Fire Commissioners Association for a good many years serving as president in 1967. One of the first things Dale did as a Commissioner was participate in the only annexation the District ever had. District 6, a half-square-mile area abutting on the south, elected to become part of District 20. The annexation boosted District 20 to two-and-a-half square miles, the same as it is today. Dale served the Fire District and the Association well until he retired the first time in 1977 after 29 years of fire service. The fellow who replaced him was Fire Captain Doug Case, who served the next two years until Boeing needed his expertise in Japan. Merrit was persuaded to serve as a Commissioner again until 1979.

The Fire District was made up of three communities, two of them active in the Fire Department. The old one, Bryn Mawr, was at the bottom of the hill, and Skyway was

at the top of the hill. A friendly rivalry developed, but when the time came to house a vehicle in Skyway, everyone got a shovel and a hammer and went to work to build a temporary garage/station. The GMC tanker was put in the Skyway barn where it housed until 1952 when the Commissioners decided it was time to update some of the capital equipment. They put a bond issue on the ballot in November 1952 for \$50,000 to purchase a Kenworth pumper and build a new station in the Skyway area. The old G.M.C. was underpowered, overloaded, underbraked and over-age. It did its last chore; it helped pass the bond issue. On a fire call the rig was going wide open up about a 3% grade when a young lad about 8 years old ran along side and yelled, "Hey mister, where is the fire?"

Shortly after the new station was built and the new Kenworth was in the barn, the Commissioners had a few dollars left over. They decided to put a paid man on the roster. Volunteer Chief Frank Longo was hired at \$375 per month. Frank recommended that two self-contained masks be purchased and also suggested Captain Jiggs Hoyt be appointed Assistant Chief, with Sam Iwasaki, Captain.

The old 1944 Seagrave was getting weak and could not pass the pump test, so the Commissioners gathered enough money together to purchase a new 1959 750-GPM American LaFrance pumper, which is still in service in 1990. The 1944 Seagrave was kept as a backup rig until 1975 when it was sold to a newly organized department near Shelton. Every year the calls mounted and it became necessary to hire another man. Victor Boulanger, a volunteer captain, filled the job and he and his family lived in the Skyway station. He had two children who knew all the addresses. In 1969, Tukwila was beginning to expand and advertised for a Chief. Vic applied and became the head man.

In 1962, the Commissioners figured the way calls were increasing it was necessary

to hire another paid man; volunteer Donald Sorenson was hired. Picking officers by popular vote was abandoned and the positions were to be filled by competitive exams. Don was the first to take the exam and passed the lieutenant's test and earned \$475 per month. Frank Longo took medical leave in 1970 and switched to the job of Secretary to the Board until his health deteriorated further. In 1971, Longo retired completely and died in 1974. When Frank first retired in 1970, Don Sorenson was appointed acting Chief and when Frank retired for good, Don was appointed Chief and has held the job ever since.

The Commissioners knew radio was here to stay so in 1968 they purchased some Plectons. They also equipped all the vehicles with Motorola radios to replace some old radios purchased from the Far West taxicabs. The trucks could now communicate with Renton which furnished dispatch service for years with no fee. There was a little more money to use for equipment, so the District purchased a 1960 American LaFrance, in 1974 a Seagrave, in 1980 an American LaFrance, and three smaller vehicles for use as aid cars.

When Harold Cummings, a commissioner for 12 years, retired at the end of his term, Jiggs Hoyt resigned as Assistant Chief and was elected to fill the Commissioner's position. Before Dale Merritt retired for the second time, the Board decided the District's aid business should be upgraded. After inspecting all brands available, they purchased a Horton modular aid car. The vehicle takes care of 75% of the alarms. EMS was coming into common vogue. The crew of District 20 today consists of six paid personnel and 20 volunteers, most of whom are EMTs. Many are also qualified in defibrillation.

The center of population changed from Bryn Mawr to Skyway. The new Chief thought it would be best to use the Skyway Station as headquarters, so in 1974 the move was made.

The old 1952 Kenworth could no longer pass the pump test. The Commissioners shopped around and found a 1980 American LaFrance demonstrator for a good price, which they purchased with coupon warrants. With the new engine, space was a premium in the 1952 headquarters station. A survey was taken for a new, larger location in the Skyway district, but the District was well built up and the only place for a fire house was in the same location as the

old one. An architect was hired and laid out a two-story building with enough room to house the operation for the price of \$275,000; \$75,000 under the architect's estimate. All this with coupon warrants.

District 20 is an island surrounded by the cities of Tukwila, Seattle and Renton. The District has a mutual aid contract with all three. This arrangement keeps #20 busy at times, but the reciprocal service would be hard to beat.

Fire  
**APPARATUS**  
*Through the Years*

