The History of Aberdeen's Fire Chiefs

By Chief Orian DeBay (1978) *updated by Chief Dave Carlberg (2012)*

Prior to 1908, due to a series of devastating fire losses in the city of Aberdeen, a political movement was in the process to create a paid professional fire department. The original volunteer department was first organized in 1889 by the merging of the Wishkah and Pioneer Hose Companies along with the Relief Hook & Ladder Company.

The 1909 Municipal Code of the City of Aberdeen outlines the establishment of a fire department which shall consist of a chief engineer, an assistant engineer by which the chief will be paid in full, and a career force of one or more paid men and one or more part pay call members. Ordinance 668 established and regulated a paid career fire department for the city and was approved January 15, 1908. The first paid fire department took over operations from the previous volunteer fire organization in February of 1908. Joe Graham was the last person to hold the position of volunteer fire chief for the city. In those days firefighters lived at the fire station 24-7. They were allowed a few hours each day to take meal breaks or other time when needed. The first career members of the department were as follows:

Perry Silvey	Ed Lunan	Andy Hadman
Frank Law	Andy Anderson	Oliver Bensinger
D.W. Stevens	W.H. Tamblyn	

The first career fire chief for the Aberdeen Fire Department was Adam S. Schneider. He had previously served as Aberdeen's chief of Police. He was born July 20, 1862 in Cambellsport, Wisconsin and served as chief of the department from February 1908 until May 3, 1911. He and his wife Rose had two daughters and a son. Chief Schneider died January 25, 1946 at the age of eighty three.

The citie's second career fire chief was 34 year old William Tamblyn who was appointed by Mayor James Parks on May 3, 1911. Chief Tamblyn was born in Cardiff, Wales in 1877. Tamblyn joined the then volunteer department in 1904 and became one of the original paid members when it was formed in 1908. He died in October, 1935 at the age of 58. He served as chief from 1911 to 1925 and was then placed back as a first assistant chief for approximately four months. He was then re-appointed chief of department. He submitted his

resignation on July 18, 1934 after serving for 30 years of which 23 years were as fire chief.

Aberdeen's third full time fire chief was Charles A. Borum. He was born August 26, 1884 in Oliversprings, Tennessee. He and his wife Hazel had three daughters. He joined the department on February 27, 1912. He was first appointed chief in January 1925 and served until April 1925. He then served as assistant chief until July 19, 1934. He was re-appointed to chief on July 20, 1934 by Mayor H. Hoorocks which he served until retirement on July 1, 1952. Chief Borum served the city for a total of 40 years and five months. He was known as a very gentle and kind person who always looked out for his fellow man.

Conrad Kromm was number four to have served the City of Aberdeen as fire chief. He was born in Saratov Russia of German parents on May 11, 1899. He came to the USA in 1903 and graduated from Colfax High School in Eastern Washington in 1921. He was appointed chief in July of 1952 by Mayor Ed Lundgren and served in that position for over 5 years. Chief Kromm retired from the department in January, 1958 after serving for twenty five years and 6 months. He and his wife Lela had a son and a daughter. Chief Kromm passed away December 31, 1961. He was well known for his fire prevention programs and as chief of the department won three state awards in the 1950's.

Royce Waldrep was to become the fifth fire chief and was appointed by then Mayor Ed Lundgren in January 1958. Chief Waldrep had completed 28 years of service with the Tacoma Fire Department and served as acting chief for three months and retired as a battalion chief in charge of training. Waldrep was born August 19, 1903 in Sunnyside, Utah. He had a son and a daughter with his first wife and a daughter with his second wife Ella. Chief Waldrep retired in January 1964 after serving as chief for six years. He then worked for five years as a fire prevention engineer for Simpson Wood Products in Shelton Washington. He also served three years as fire commissioner at Mason County Fire District 5. There were many fire photos taken by Jones Photo during his tenure. The reason for this is Chief Waldrep and Bill Jones of Jones Photo were next door neighbors. Whenever a fire occurred, Waldrep would knock on his neighbors door and the two would ride to the fire together. Chief Waldrep died June 1, 1985.

On January 16, 1964 Louie Larson became the sixth person to take over as fire chief of the Aberdeen Fire Department. Mayor Walt Failor made the appointment. Chief Larson was born September 24, 1916

and joined the department on June 22, 1943. He had two daughters, one by his first wife and one by his second Liz. He served the city for 23 years with the last two as chief of the department and retired on June 23 1966. During Chief Larson's tenure, the department built two new fire stations and acquired a fire boat that served until 1983. Chief Larson passed away March 8, 1995.

The appointed position for Aberdeen's seventh fire chief was Zane Mitchell. He became a firefighter, first for the City of Hoquiam where he served for three years along side his brother Ken Mitchell. Zane became an Aberdeen Firefighter in July of 1952. He was appointed chief by Mayor Walt Failor on June 28, 1966. Chief Mitchell retired September 30, 1974 after serving 22 years and three months of which eight years was chief. Chief Mitchell and his wife Peggy had son and a daughter. Chief Mitchell passed away on January 22, 2001.

The eighth appointee to the position of fire chief was Jim Ferguson. He was appointed by Mayor Walt Failor on January 1, 1975. He began his firefighting career in Orange County, California after a tour of duty with the U.S Marine Corp. He then came to Richland Washington and became the fire chief there for approximately 2 years before coming to Aberdeen. He was born July 21, 1942 in Morton Washington. At the time he came to Aberdeen as chief he was 32 years old. He was seriously injured in an auto accident on May 24, 1976 and was placed on medical disability. On November 25, 1976 he was forced to retire due to disability from his injuries. He served as chief for one year and five months. He and his wife Doscine had three sons.

Orian DeBay became the ninth appointed chief of the department, effective November 26, 1976. Mayor Walt Failor had appointed DeBay as the acting chief from October 1, 1974 to the first of January, 1975. When Ferguson was badly injured on May 24, 1976, he took over as the chief until permanently appointed. He joined the department on April 22, 1948 and retired on June 30, 1978, thus serving the City of Aberdeen for 30 years and two months with one year and seven months as fire chief. He was responsible for enacting the citie's smoke detector ordinance in rental properties following a devastating loss of six lives in a residential fire. When he retired from the city, he immediately took a job at the Washington State Fire Marshals office as an inspector and worked nearly 15 years retiring on December 4, 1993. He was selected as the Daily World firefighter of the year for 1994. Chief DeBay was born in Sedro Woolley, Washington May 29, 1925. He served in the U.S. Naval Reserves for over thirty years. Chief DeBay and his wife Georgia had one son and two daughters.

One of Chief DeBay's grandsons is currently a firefighter in the Seattle area. Chief DeBay was a man of integrity and a leader in the advancement of new ideas. Chief DeBay passed away on March 6, 1995.

The tenth appointment for the position of fire chief for the city was Neil Laughead. The effective date of his appointment was June 30, 1978. He joined the department on June 12, 1959. He was born February 23, 1933 in Hoquiam, Washington. He retired from the department on December 31, 1984. He served the department for 25 years and six of those years were chief of department. He also served as a fire commissioner for Grays Harbor Fire District 10. Chief Laughead was married and had one son and a daughter. He passed away on July 11, 2009 at the age of 76.

The eleventh fire chief was Lowell Killen who was appointed on January 1, 1985. Chief Killen was born on October 1, 1944 in Baltimore, Maryland. He was married and had three daughters and one son. He entered service with the Aberdeen Fire Department on October 24, 1966. He served as chief of the department for 10 years and retired on January 5, 1995. Chief Killen was the first fire chief to receive executive fire officer status from the National Fire Academy in Emittsburg, Maryland.

The twelfth city of Aberdeen Fire Chief was Steve Mitchell. Steve was the son of former fire chief Zane Mitchell. Chief Mitchell was born on December 18, 1947 in Aberdeen Washington. After serving in the Air Force he began his firefighting career on October 2, 1973. He served as an interim chief during the disability period of Chief Killen and was eventually appointed by Mayor Chuck Gurrad to the position of chief in January 1995. Chief Mitchell had a son and a daughter. During his 4 ½ year tenure as department chief, he was a huge proponent of public education. He successfully lobbied for new fire prevention ordinances and a smoke detector program. He retired April

The thirteenth fire chief to serve the city of Aberdeen was Dave Carlberg. He was appointed May 1, 1999 by then Mayor Chuck Gurrad. He was born September 22, 1957 in Aberdeen Washington. He and his wife Debbie had a son and a daughter. While attending Bates Technicial College for fire service training in 1976, he began his firefighting career with the city of Sumner, Washington as a resident firefighter. He left the Sumner department in 1977 to begin a career at the Aberdeen Fire Department in February, 1978. As a captain with

the department he was selected as the Daily World firefighter of the year in 1997. He is currently still actively serving.

Aberdeen Career Fire Chiefs

1)	Adam Schneider	February 1908 - May 1911
2)	William Tamblyn	May 1911 – July 1934
3)	Charles Borum	July 1934 – July 1952
4)	Conrad Kromm	July 1952 – January 1958
5)	Royce Waldrep	January 1958 – January 1964
6)	Louie Larson	January 1964 – June 1966
7)	Zane Mitchell	June 1966 – September 1974
8)	Jim Ferguson	January 1975 – November 1976
9)	Orian DeBay	November 1976 – June 1978
10)	Neil Laughead	June 1978 – December 1984
11)	Lowell Killen	January 1985 – January 1995
12)	Steve Mitchell	January 1995 – April 30, 1999
13)	Dave Carlberg	May 1999 –