





Chapter Three

1930 - 1939

The 1930's was a decade of limited highs and historical lows. The Great Depression was influencing the overall growth of Houston as a community. The economic slowdown of the 1930's for Houston was symbolic of an energetic city taking a breather after a very long run. Strong willed local businessman Jesse Jones would guide our city around the worst of the Great Depression allowing room for entrepreneurial opportunities. Prohibition would finally end and a little known technological advance called air conditioning would make our unforgiving heat a little more tolerable.

It was determined that the Fire Department Fire Fighters needed additional training and in 1931 the Harris County Emergency Corps was founded. The HCEC trained Fire Fighters on resuscitation and other life saving techniques. The group also provided medical aid at emergencies and maintained a salvage operation. In 1932 the HCEC offered first aid training to over 2,500 local Houston citizens and saved 18 lives. That same

year the Fire Department had 382 men working out of 26 fire houses. The 1930's would be a hard decade for area churches. The First Presbyterian Church on Main at McKinney would burn in the early 1930's and Christ Church Cathedral would sustain heavy damage from a fire in 1938. A hard rain in December of 1935 would flood most of Houston's business district making fire fighting in high water a reality. It would take another 66 years before a tropical storm called Allison would cause more damage than the flood of 1935.

The population of Houston was growing, almost 400,000 by the end of the decade. Fire House No. 2 would see its neighbor, the old Sam Houston Hall, replaced by the brand new Sam Houston Coliseum in 1937. The next year the new Fire Alarm Building was opened. The city of Houston would get a new City Hall building in 1939, thanks to a grant from the Works Progress Administration.

Fire Chiefs:

Ernest "Navy" Hartwell
Jasper H. Davidson
Homer F. Lyles

Line of Duty Deaths:

Charles Roland Rusk
Esker J. Rogers
Alford H. Schutze

Left: This fire in 1932 would destroy part of the historic First Presbyterian Church on Main Street causing over \$100,000 in damages. The congregation would temporarily hold services at the Metropolitan Movie Theatre. (Houston Fire Museum)



On May 8, 1931 a gas explosion in a bakery leveled almost a whole block on West Grey. The ensuing fire was put out by the Fire Department but not before the damage spread to the surrounding businesses. An employee at the bakery was blown out of the back door and suffered severe burns but was the only one injured. (The Story Sloane Collection)



Above Left: Fire and explosion, 4734 Polk Street. April 5, 1933. (Houston Fire Museum)

Above from Top Left to Bottom Right: Houston Fire Department Fire Chiefs 1933-1947. (All Photos, Houston Fire Department)
 Ernest B. "Navy" Hartwell, Fire Chief 1933-1935
 Jasper H. Davidson, Fire Chief 1935-1939
 Homer F. Lyles, Fire Chief 1939-1947

Left: Fire Fighters doing overhaul after a fire in 1935. (Family of Ralph Grant)

In October 1932 the Houston Fire Department hosted the “Southwestern Fire Chief’s Convention”. The Department published a 50-page book to commemorate the event. All of the almost 400 Fire Fighters from 26 Fire Houses were photographed and placed in the book. It appears the Fire Fighters (Privates) and Captains were grouped both by their rank and by the Fire House to which they were assigned. In addition to the individual photos show here on pages 58-65, the photographer (his name was never listed) was also allowed to photograph the crews of the Houston Fire Department in their respective Fire Houses. (Houston Fire Department)

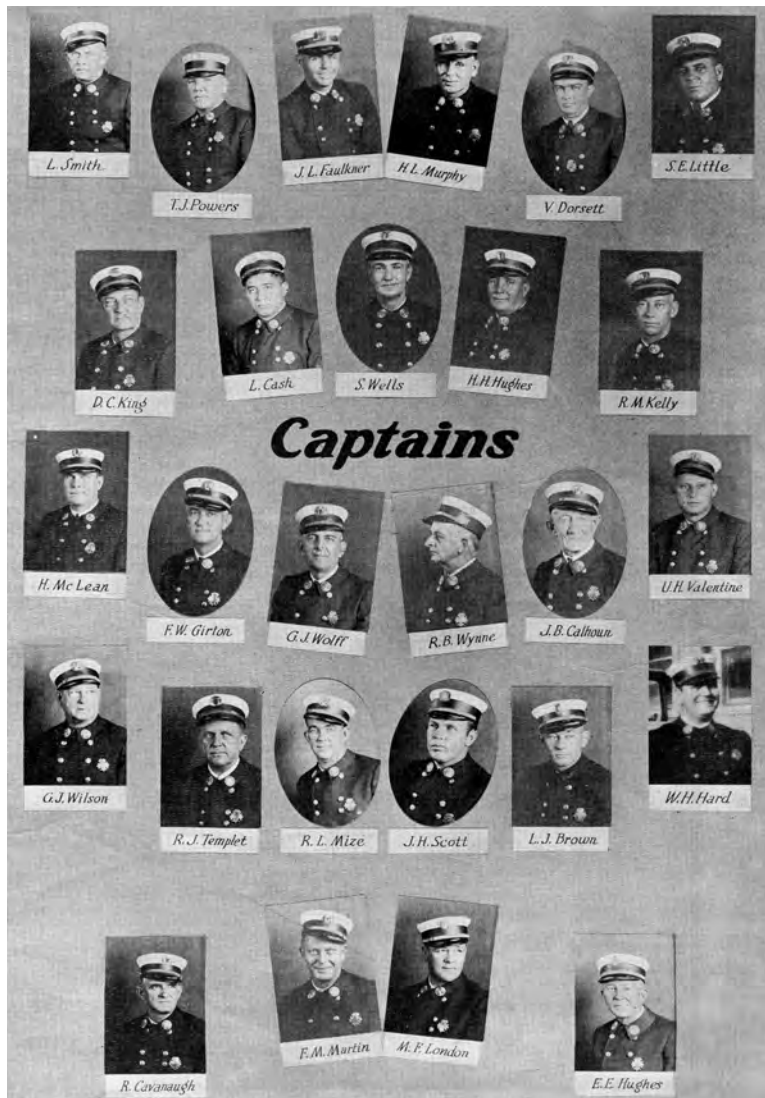




Above Left: The Fire Fighters of the Central Fire Station, 1300 Preston Avenue. Photo taken in February 1931. Fire Fighters identified from left to right. Top row, first man, Mike Lathrop, fourth man, Leroy Jackson, and the last man in the row is Frank Catino. Middle row, third man, James Vawler, eighth man in the row is Andrew Gilmore. Bottom row, Driver Vernon Smith, Chief Jasper Davidson, Captain Joseph Fritsche, Chief Ed Kohlman, Driver Curtis Scallan. (Family of Mike Lathrop)

Above: Page from the 1932 Southwestern Fire Chief's Convention. This shows all of the Houston Fire Department's Chief Officers. As we say now the "Command Staff". (Houston Fire Department)

Left: The crew of Fire House No. 3, 1900 Houston Avenue. Photo taken in February 1931. Identified in the photo on the first row second man from the left is Captain Alexander Helmin, next man is Captain Oscar Henning. (Houston Fire Department)



Above: Page from the 1932 Southwestern Fire Chief's Convention. This shows all of the HFD's Captains. (Houston Fire Department)

Above Right: The crew of Fire House No. 16, 1413 Westheimer Avenue. Left to right, top row, William Miller, Thomas Cudd, Roy Miller, Oswald Bokemeyer, Fred Keepers, Unknown. Bottom Row, Driver Walter Dudensing, Captian Malcolm Drohan, Captain Urban Valentine, Unknown. (Family of Walter Dudensing)

Right: Crew of Fire House No. 25, 3024 Blodgett. Left to right, top row, Ranson Blalock, Unknown, Wesley Summers, Charles Isenhour, Carroll Durham, Walter Naurath, Captain Andrew Hughes, Captain Frank Martin, Edward Kochanowsky. (Family of Ed Kochanowsky)

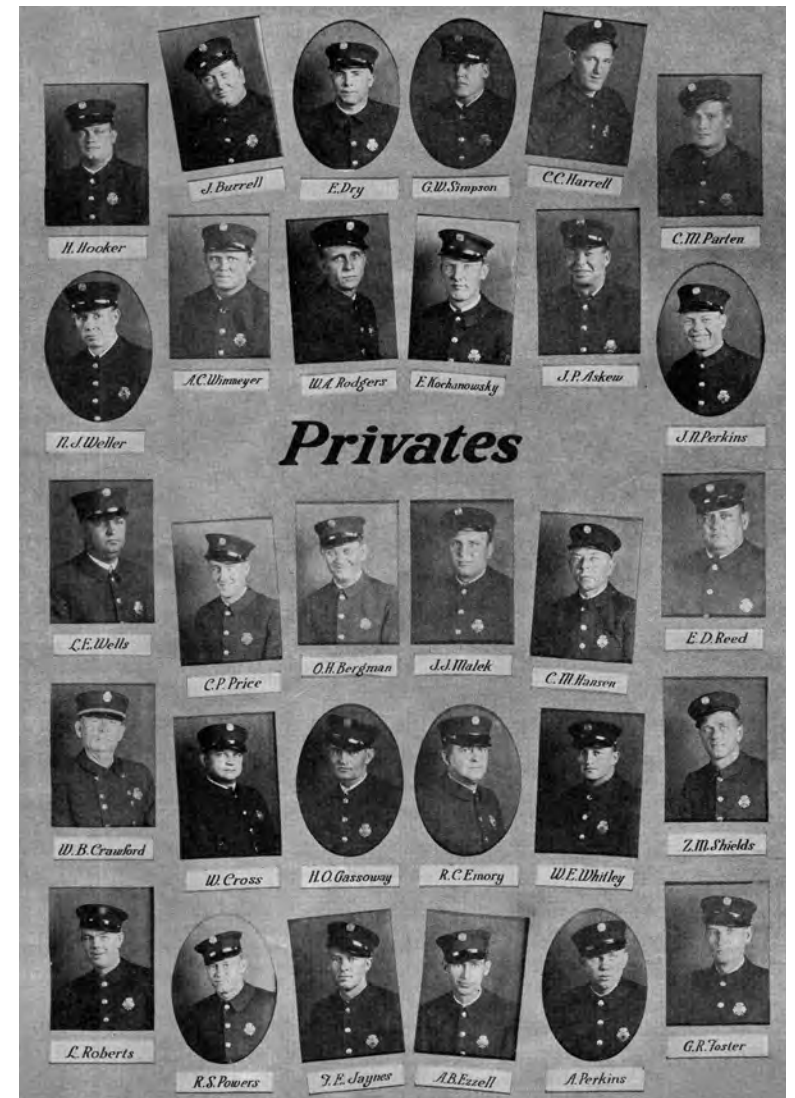




The crew of Fire House No. 2, Capitol and Bagby. Photo taken in February 1931. From left to right, bottom row, Normal "Slim" Crowson, Clarence "Rene" Valentine, Robert "Slim" Templeton, Pressley Clooney, Eagle McCormick and "Uncle" Joe Wozniak. Second row, Eddie Donnelly, Tom Powers, Charley Middlekauf, Navy Hartwell, Ben Cafferty, William Pratt. Third row, Jack Donley, Tony Tirretta, Leslie Holt. Robert Earl Sunday, Ed Schafer, Rudolph Mendel, Herne Hooker and Robert Mize. Top row, Unknown, Jack Lavin. Bismark Potozka, George Greenwood, Ernest Collier, Unknown, Milton "Frenchy" Seureau and Bill Kittinger. (Family of Herne Hooker)



The crew of Fire House 14, 107 W. 12th Avenue. The men identified in the photo are from left to right, top row, George Adams, Charles Rusk. Bottom row, fourth man, Captain George Wolff, Battalion Chief Herman Diez, and the last man on the right is Driver Albert Fleck. (Houston Fire Fighter Harry LeMaster)



Above Left: The crew of Fire House No. 5, 910 Hardy. Left to right, top row, Michael Callanan, Ernest Scarborough, Ray Tenninson, Harry Lado and James Norton. Bottom row, Albert York, Captain Marble Sullivan, Captain Vernon Dorsett and William “Bill” Hausinger. (Family of William “Bill” Hausinger Sr.)

Above: Page from the 1932 Southwestern Fire Chief’s Convention showing all of the HFD’s Privates. In modern day this would be the rank of Fire Fighter. (Houston Fire Department)

Left: The crew of Fire House No. 10, 205 Chartres. Left to right, top row, John Askew, William Michaels, Unknown, Pressley Clooney, A. P. Hartman, Bryan Stahl. Bottom row, Andrew Stahl, Claude Feray, Captain Laymon Johnson, Captain Herman Huges, John Ruby and Leo Edmonds. (Family of Leo Edmonds)



Top Right: The crew of Fire House No.23, Manchester Avenue and San Antonio. Left to right, top row, Paul Jones, Unknown, J. B. Martin, Unknown, Unknown, Alfred Butler. Bottom row, Unknown, Captain Pat Daly, Unknown, Wallace Lawhon. (Family of Paul Jones)

Above: Page from the 1932 Southwestern Fire Chief's Convention. This page shows the Fire Chief's support staff. (Houston Fire Department)

Right: The crew of Fire House No. 21, located on the Manchester Wharfs. This is the crew that manned the fire boat, "Port Houston". Identified in this photo from left to right, top row, Unknown, John Brannon, Joseph Malek, Unknown, Ralph Emory, and Unknown. Middle row, Chief Engineer Lynn Reed, Charles Hansen, Unknown, Ernest Reed, Charles Henning, Unknown, and Milton Henry. Bottom row, Captain Louie Jack Brown, Captain John Fraser, Unknown, and Captain Byron Adams. (Family of Joseph Malek)





The crew of Fire House No. 7, 2403 Milam. The Fire Fighter identified in this photo from left to right are, middle row, Walter Loose. Bottom row, fourth man, John Baldwin, Battalion Chief Grover Adams, and Captain Drew King.
(Houston Fire Department)



The City of Houston experienced two devastating floods within six years of each other. The first was in 1929 and the Fire Department played an important role providing emergency services along the banks of Buffalo Bayou. The second event in 1935 however would push the flood waters over the banks of the bayou a good eight feet and encroach into major downtown developments. The Yellow Cab Company had a garage burning and the only way to get water to fight the fire was to draft it from the flooded streets. The flood waters would surround Fire House No. 2 and make canoes a secondary form of transportation for most of downtown.

Above Right: (The Bob Bailey Collection)

All Other Photos: (Family of J. B. Martin)







Houston Fire Department Marching Band under the direction of Walter Cross, shown on the far right of the photo. Fire Commissioner Frank Mann had a big part in organizing the band in 1932. Commissioner Mann is on the far left of the photo. Chief Homer Lyle is also in the photo, he is next to the band leader Walter Cross. The information on the back of this photo was written by Chief John S. Little Jr. Chief Little stated that he was a member of the band when it began. During this period there was another marching band, "Fire and Police Band". He also stated that many of the men had played in both bands. This photo was taken in front of the Central Station in 1935. (Family of John Little Jr.)





Written on the back of this photo was “Dugan’s Band on to New Orleans”. We don’t have a lot of information on this band. The leader of the band was Alferd “Dugan” Butler, who served the HFD from 1923 to 1962. He worked at Fire House No. 2. The “send off” to New Orleans is in front of the Fire House. The crew in the background is the Engine Crew. The Fire Fighter on the far right is Molly Walker. The photo was probably taken around 1935.

(Family of Ralph Grant)



Above Left: The third generation Fire House No. 6 was located 901 Henderson at Decatur Street. It was built in 1931 to replace the 28-year-old Fire House located on 1702 Washington Avenue. In 1987 a new Fire House was built 3402 Washington Avenue at Lakin Street. (Houston Fire Department)

Above: Fire House No. 11 located 4320 Washington Avenue was built in 1937. It was built on the same lot as the Fire House built in 1915. This Fire House was in use until it was closed down in 1991 to provide manpower for the new Fire House No. 2 located at 5880 Woodway at Bering Drive. In 1995 a new Fire House was built at 460 T. C. Jester. (Houston Fire Department)

Left: Fire House No. 5, 910 Hardy, built in 1932 to replace the Fire House that stood in the same location for 37 years. (Houston Fire Department)



The Houston Fire Department's Fire Alarm Office moved from the dispatch office housed in the Central Fire Station at 1300 Preston to this building located at 1020 Bagby. Opened in 1938, this building was used until 1975. When it opened there were five Chief Dispatchers, 13 Dispatchers and six Pipe and Laddermen (Fire Fighers) assigned there.
(The Story Sloane Collection)



Above Left: By the 1930's the Houston Fire Department had a state of the art fire alarm dispatch center. This photos shows it in operation. This office took emergency calls by telephone and monitored the 200-plus fire alarm pull boxes through out the city. (Houston Fire Department)

Above: This is one of the dispatch consoles used by the fire alarm dispatchers. (Family of Ralph Grant)

Left: This photo shows the new equipment installed in the new fire alarm building in operation. (Earl McWilliams)





On March 22, 1938 the Waddell Furniture store experienced a spectacular early morning blaze. It was a four alarm event resulting in a total loss for the furniture store. The cost of the fire was estimated to be over \$500,000. The damage extended to several adjacent businesses including \$100,000 worth of destruction to Christ Church Cathedral. Several Fire Fighters were injured battling the blaze. They were treated on the scene and returned to help extinguish the fire.

Above Left: (Family of J. B. Martin)

Left: (Houston Metropolitan Research Center)

Opposite Page: (University of Houston)





Top Right: Steamer 2, was stored at the original Fire House No. 5. It is not known what kind of photo opportunity this was, perhaps the Fire Fighter in the seat of the steamer had horse drawn experience. Photo taken 1939. (Family of John Ruby)

Above: This Fire Fighter's Frolic program illustrates the department's ongoing community involvement. (Simos Georgandis)

Right: The two men that are identified, from left to right, are the fifth man as Captain John Ruby, who entered the department in 1918. The sixth man is identified as Chief Grover Adams, who entered the department in 1915. They both started their career during the "Horse Drawn Era". Photo taken 1939. (Family of John Ruby)





Fire House No. 5 in 1930. The Captain on the far left of the photo is Marble Sullivan. Vernon Dorsett, early in his career, is the fourth man from the left. The last man on the right is Captain J. M. Smith.
(The Family of Vernon Dorsett)



In the month of December 1935, the Houston Fire Department fought three large fires. The Thos. Goggan and Bro. Music Store was one of those large fires. The fire started about 6 p.m., December 26, 1935 and went to a fourth alarm. The building was three stories, the first two housed the music store and the top floor was the Fox Hotel. All the guests were safely evacuated. The fire caused about \$40,000 in damage. Water Tower 1 can be seen in the background doing its job after serving the HFD for 23 years and would continue to work until 1960.

(Houston Metropolitan Research Center)



The 1930's would end with a new civic center area built with financing from the Works Progress Administration. Houston would get a new City Hall and convention arena. Fire House No. 2 sits just to the right of the Sam Houston Coliseum. (The Story Sloan Collection)