

RURAL FIRE DISTRICT NEARS IN ROGUE RIVER AREA

Petitions Seek New Protection Service

By Elizabeth Sheffield
Mail Tribune Special Writer

Rogue River, Apr. 14—Petitions are being circulated here for the formation of a rural fire protection district to furnish protection to many areas surrounding Rogue River. Under the proposal, taxes in the district would be increased by about four mills.

Petitions for the formation of the district have been circulated by members of the Lions club auxiliary, who report they have obtained the signatures of most of the rural residents of the proposed district, and that the rural residents are anxious for the additional protection.

Because of the efforts being made on behalf of the district, it was felt that a review of organized fire protection in this area would be in order. Work on the formation of the district really began in 1947.

A quart fruit jar, partially filled with money, sat on the counter of a Rogue River grocery store, one fall day in that year and tied around it was a piece of scratch paper bearing the hastily scrawled words, "For the family."

As customer after customer received change, coins and bills were quickly stuffed into the jar. **Family Burned Out**

"Some folks up the creek got burned out last night," explained Dave Gelvin, the store keeper. "They lost everything they owned," he fumed, "and we were helpless! There was nothing we could do about it! Absolutely nothing! But there's going to be something done mighty quick. There's got to be some way figured out I tell you its tough to look into a man's face when he has lost all he owned by fire, and you weren't there to help him fight it. Whether he is a friend or an enemy, a customer or not, when he loses it hurts our town."

He reflected the sentiments of the townspeople, and the "something" was done within a very short time.

Max Miller had for years organized fire departments in the state of California before coming to Oregon, and he quickly reorganized the little company of volunteer firemen of the city of Rogue River.

"In 1912, when Woodville was incorporated and became the 'City of Rogue River,' First Assistant Chief Gordon Hatch explained, 'the city hall was built, and a volunteer fire department was organized. The fire equipment purchased then was used for years, it consisted of two hose carts, about a thousand feet of hose and four ladders.'

Help Drag Cart
"When the old fire bell on top of the city hall rang every one turned out to help. We kids especially always wanted to help drag the hose cart, and the smaller boys ran shouting after it. Folks would rush from their houses and by yelling back and forth, learn the location of the fire, and run to the scene on foot. It wasn't far to run, because the town was small then. There was a house or two beyond the new school on the road to Wimer, but Broadway was just a road leading to Dead Horse canyon, Hatch continued.

There were only about thirty houses and two hotels, and the depot which stood between the bridge and the town, squarely in the center of Depot street. We were on the main line of the railroad then, and we had a real depot, and hotels instead of motor courts. On the south side of the river there were only five or six ranch houses between the bridge and Birdseye's.

"I'll never forget the last run we made with that old hose cart," recalls Dave Gelvin. "It was in 1938 and Nat Hart was the fire chief. Fortunately the fire didn't amount to much. It was upstairs in the Hilger house. I dragged the hose cart up Main street with the help of two boys, Dale and Kenny Hatch, nephews of Gordon, and when we got there we were so exhausted we didn't have strength enough to attach the hose to the fire hydrant. Between pants of breath I swore that would be the last

time I would ever drag a cart. So we got busy."

Get Old Sedan

From the top of King mountain where it had been wrecked, was brought an old Marquette sedan belonging to Elmer Milton. Its motor was overhauled, its body disassembled to give place to running boards, hand rails and other appurtenances of a fire truck, and mounted at the rear, wound with coils of grey hose, was the reel from the old hose cart. Thus equipped, the Marquette served throughout the war as the sole protection against destruction of the community by fire. For nine years as the little town grew and doubled and tripled in size, and luxurious country homes were constructed along the Rogue River, it remained the only fire fighting equipment in a large area of the county.

The inadequate home-made truck, whose construction cost less than \$100 with its crew of volunteers stood guard over the growing town, while buildings worth half a million dollars spread over a ten mile area. They had no protection until Max Miller organized the rural fire department in 1947. He served as fire chief.

Truck Modernized
The Marquette hose truck was overhauled, the cart reel removed and the hose folded in place in the truck bed. Another truck was equipped for the rural fire service, because the old city owned Marquette must always stand by with its ready crew in case of fire within the city limits.

Construction of the rural fire truck began the donation of a one and a half ton Ford chassis by Rollin Miller. Then followed weeks of welding, painting and other work done in the shop of Carl the Welder, by volunteers, as they labored to build an efficient fire fighting machine. Other firemen were busy remodeling the entrance of the city hall. When the truck was finally done, complete with bright red paint, it was carefully eased into place beside the old Marquette. With a scant two feet of space between them they stand today, in the fire hall which was built to house two hose carts.

Protect From Fires
One of the first major fires to which the new rural firemen were called was a cabin behind the Rogue View inn, and though the cabin was past saving when the alarm was given, they were able to protect the main lodge building and prevent its destruction. Similar fires have since occurred where thousands of dollars worth of surrounding property was protected though the fire consumed the building in which it started. Lack of rural telephones to report fires has been a great drawback in the district.

"Our greatest difficulty," Fire Chief Gelvin said, "has been a financial one. 'We have bought hose and rebuilt and equipped the trucks ourselves, while the city pays the maintenance costs. To raise funds to do this work we first gave a fireman's dance in the high school gym. Under the promotion of Bill Reeder, our honorary fire chief, the men put on a good skit, dressed in costumes of the early days. They wore helmets and carried equipment borrowed from the Jacksonville museum. The public responded generously."

Members Sign Note
"Later \$2,500 was borrowed on a note signed by each mem-

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ROGUE RIVER FIREMEN HOPE FOR NEW DISTRICT—Shown above are volunteer firemen at Rogue River, who have been active in promoting petitions for the formation of a new rural fire protection district in the country near Rogue River. History of the town's fire protection, and plans for the new district, are told in the accompanying article by Elizabeth Sheffield. Mail Tribune Rogue River correspondent. In the picture, left to right seated, are Larry Hatch, Faye Stiehl, Flores Leyen, Stuart Hatch, second assistant chief; Gordon Hatch, first assistant chief; Fire Chief Dave Gelvin and Roy Milton. Standing are Drivers Sidney Baker and Glen Nourse.

—(Photo by June Dement).

ber of the organization," Gelvin added, "and the money was used to build a dance pavilion in the city park beside the Rogue river. Each Saturday night throughout

the summer, dances are held there to raise funds for the fire department. This summer should see the paying of the last installment on the note."

"We have had some donations, too," said Gelvin, "and everyone has given us their full support, especially the business men of the district. By district, I mean

the lower Evans valley, and all up and down highway 99 from the county line to a point about five miles south of the bridge. All this support comes because Rogue River men can not stand idle and see a fellow man lose his home because it lies a few feet over the city line or across the river. We do our best for everyone within our reach, and what we do is done at our own and the city's expense. We need a rural fire protection district so we will have funds to continue to protect our rural neighbors. They are our neighbors, our friends, and an integral part of the life of our community. In protecting their homes and business buildings we are strengthening the economic structure of the whole area."

Added Tax In District

Formation of the proposed district would increase by four mills the taxes on property lying within the district but outside of the city limits. The property owners within the city limits are already paying for fire protection, and forming of the district would not increase their taxes.

Though some of the ranchers were not at home when they called and the wives preferred leaving the signing to their husbands, however they all expressed their approval of the district. By district, I mean

Medford Nurses Plan To Attend Convention

At least two Medford women will attend the 16th biennial nursing convention in San Francisco May 7 to 12, it was reported here Saturday. The convention is sponsored by the National

League of Nursing Education and the National Organization for Public Health Nursing. From here Miss Gertrude Malloy and Miss Lotus Eaton will attend the conclaves. Eight thousand nurses, representing 200,000 professional registered nurses in the United States, Hawaii and Puerto Rico are expected at the convention. The theme will be "Health—A Unifying World Influence: Nursing Accepts Its Role."

The committee obtaining signatures includes Georgia Salter, Louise Goosey, Mary Wohgen, Beverly Lilly, Gertrude Shontz, Midge Petrie and Carolyn Gelvin.

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