



REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, Retired

April 27th 2009 marks the 110th anniversary of Houston's first Fire Fighter Line-of-Duty Death, Ed Thompson. Thompson entered the Houston Fire Department January 1, 1897. He was assigned to Station #5 at 910 Hardy as a "Pipeman" (Fire Fighter) and died while the Hose Wagon he was riding on was racing to a house fire.

To set this story up, let me put a few things into perspective. In 1899, most of Houston's streets were dirt with only a few paved with bricks. There were a few automobiles in the area – horses or horse driven vehicles were the main mode of transportation. Each call the Fire Fighters made, at break-neck speed, was as dangerous as the fire they had to fight when they arrived on the scene.

On the day of Thompson's death, there were four men riding on Hose Wagon #5 with him. The Driver, Henry Donnelly (who was one of Houston's first paid Fire Fighters), began his 50 year career in 1895 and retired in 1945. The Captain, Ed Franks, was also one of the first paid Fire Fighters serving the HFD for 29 years. The two "Pipemen" riding on the back with Ed were James Fitzgibbons and Fred Seibert. Fitzgibbon's career had just begun and he went on to serve about 14 more years. Fred Seibert who served as Fire Chief twice in his 35 year career started in 1898 and retired in 1933.

The accident that killed Ed Thompson occurred shortly after 1:00 p.m. The hose wagon he rode was in route to a house fire on Crockett Street. The location was just a little over 3 miles from Station #5. The house fire was close to Houston Avenue. However, Houston Avenue, at the time, was in bad shape and the Fire Fighters had to take another route when traveling in that direction. The street they were forced to use was Hickory, which still exists today. A railroad track that contained a very steep grade and a blind spot crossed Hickory Street, making the crossing very dangerous.

As Hose Wagon #5 approached the crossing, a railroad switch engine was pushing 11 cars across the intersection with three trainmen on top of the cars. With the combination of the noise of the wagon, the horses and the blind spot, the crew did not see the lead train car until after they were well up the grade of the crossing. Henry Donnelly, an experienced driver, knew he had no way to stop to avoid disaster and was forced to continue in order to try to keep his crew out of harms way. With the proper commands to the well trained horses, he was able to cross over the track – beating the lead train car to the crossing. The three men sitting in the back of the wagon knew their only chance to survive the collision was to jump out of the back of the wagon. Fitzgibbons and Seibert were the first to jump with Thompson right behind them. The first two men landed clear of the train tracks, when Thompson jumped he fell backwards onto the tracks.

The funeral service was held the next day. Hose Wagon #5 transported the Fire Fighter to Glenwood Cemetery where he was buried in the "Fireman's Plot". Ed Thompson was survived by his wife and seven children.



EMIL "ED" THOMPSON



This photo of Hose Wagon #10 was taken in the early 1900's - which was similar to Hose Wagon #5.

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Now in closing this month's article, I must let you know about changes I am making to this column: My "Remembering Our Fallen Fire Fighters" articles will be published in the months of January, February, April, June, August, October, and December.

On the alternate months, the list of our deceased Fire Fighters - "Remember to Never Forget" and my picture pages - "The Faces of Local 341" will still be run in this publication.

Remembering To Never Forget

RONALD WAYNE GUNNELS

Served HFD 1964 to 2001

Died March 11, 2009

RODNEY DALE WATERS

Served HFD 1985 to 2009

Died January 31, 2009

PHILLIP STEVEN "STEVIE" SCHULTZ

Served HFD 1967 to 2002

Died March 5, 2009

THEODORE GREGORY HILL

Served HFD 1970 to 1990

Died January 21, 2009

BOBBY DEE CARRAWAY

Served HFD 1968 to 2004

Died February 18, 2009

GEORGE HARLAN CONWAY

Served HFD 1952 to 1977

Died January 13, 2009

PHILLIP LEE HUDGENS

Served HFD 1977 to 2005

Died February 1, 2009

TRACY BIRKELBACH

Served HFD 1961 to 1991

Died January 1, 2009

Total from January 1, 2009 to present - 8 Deaths

Total for the Year 2008 - 39 Deaths

LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL

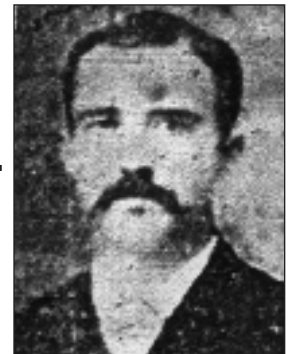
April 4, 2004

**KEVIN WAYNE
KULOW**

Probationary
Fire Fighter - Station 50



April 26, 1908

BARNEY C. MOFFATT
Fire Fighter - Station 7

April 14, 1949

**ROBERT "BOBBY"
WIER MILBURN**

Chauffeur - Station 7



April 27, 1899

**EMIL "ED"
THOMPSON**
Fire Fighter - Station 5

For current information on deceased Fire Fighters, please go to my website: www.houstonfirememorial.org
and click on "Recent Deaths" or email Scott at scottmel@juno.com

My website contains information on current Houston Fire Fighter deaths, obits, line-of-duty deaths and many other items. There is also information on my memorial t-shirts. If you have any input on this site, I would be glad to hear from you, email me at scottmel@juno.com

Also visit www.firefighterclosecalls.com. Website where my friend and Fire Fighter safety advocate Billy Goldfedder has his information. Also while you are there sign up for his email newsletter The Secret List, where you will get current information on Fire Fighter injuries and deaths around the United States.

The Faces of Local 341

1932 to 2008

Houston Professional Fire Fighter's Association

Photos on this page submitted by Scott Mellott (Retired)



**In memory of Richard Frank Smith.
HFD 1978 - April 28th, 2007**

Photo provided by Bill Love



**Fire Station 25 C-Shift - 3902 Scott Street.
(Top) Captain John Zepeda; Ennio Ponte-E/O.
(Bottom l/r) Zach Likins-FF; Al Sanchez-FF;
Johnny Peters-FF.**

Photo provided by Scott Mellott



Fire Station 33 C-Shift - 7100 Fannin - 1984.

**(Back l-r) Mark Taylor; Darrell Deckard; Ernie Hooker; EJ Bender; Jeff Watson; Dane Stewart
(Front l-r) Stanford Riley; Mark Cummings; Mike Dries; Terry Stone; Anthony J. Tamborello; Larry Vackar.**

Photo provided by Anthony Tamborello

The Faces of Local 341

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Fire Station 16 C-Shift - 1700 Richmond - November 29, 2008.

**(l-r) Craig Grissom-FF; Aldo Ramos-E/O; Captain Joe Sanchez; Tommy Olson-FF;
Sr. Captain Delbert Burleson; Al Thurston-FF; Hobert Hoggard-E/O; Aaron Becerra-FF.**

Photo provided by Scott Mellott



Fire Station 20 A-Shift - 6902 Navigation - April 22, 2008.

**(l/r) Richard Lejarza-E/O; Johnny Villereal-E/O; Arnold Ruiz-FF; Captain Mike Lane; Peter Ganz-E/O;
Russell Garcia-FF; Sr. Captain Jimmy Campbell; Tony Romos-FF; Michael White-FF; Chief Rick Hoppas.**

Photo provided by Scott Mellott