

# George C. Hale

Fire Chief

1850-1923

by Susan Jezak Ford

Kansas City fire chief George Hale was once known as the world's most famous fireman. Not only did he patent more than 60 fire-fighting inventions, but he was also chosen to represent the United State in an international fire exhibit in London in 1893. In front of the lord mayor and royalty, Hale led the Kansas City Fire Department to a first-place victory.

Hale arrived in Kansas City in 1863 at the age of 14, where he soon began working in a machine shop. He helped build the Hannibal Bridge and volunteered in 1867 with the fire company to run ahead of the fire wagons with a lighted torch. He became a paid fireman in 1871, assistant chief in 1878 and chief in 1882.

During his 31 years of employment with the fire department, Hale perfected many methods and devices that allowed fire fighters to arrive at fires quickly and fight them effectively. Among his inventions was the Hale Swinging Harness that allowed horses to be harnessed to the fire wagon within seconds. Hale also invented the water tower, an immense contraption pulled by three horses that was capable of shooting 5 1/2 tons of water per minute, and the automatic fire alarm, which alerted a city's central fire station to a fire's location.

Hale worked hard to keep politics out of the fire department, but was removed from his post in 1902 by Mayor James A. Reed. Hale was accused of a number of charges, including insubordination, extravagance and falsifying reports, but he was not allowed to defend himself before the city council. His reputation as an expert in firefighting remained and he was invited to head a team of fire fighters at the Louisiana Purchase exhibition in 1903, where he unveiled the second fire engine in the country that contained an automobile engine.

Hale continued to invent and manufacture fire-fighting equipment until his death in 1923.

Sources



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