

Patrick Henry Raymond



Born: 1831

Died: July 28, 1892

Patrick H. Raymond was reportedly the first African American fire chief. He was born in Philadelphia, the son of the Reverend John and Susan Raymond. His father, a runaway slave from Virginia who became a well-known abolitionist in New York City, was one of the early pastors of the African Meeting House in Boston.

About 1847, the Raymond family moved to Cambridge, where they lived on Washington Street near Kendall Square in the "lower Port," Cambridge's first African American neighborhood. Raymond worked as a shoemaker before becoming a journalist at the Boston Herald and the Boston Advertiser. Able to pass as white, he and his brother joined the Navy in 1862 and served until 1864.

In 1864, Raymond returned to Cambridge, and in 1869 became the editor of the weekly Cambridge Press. In 1871, Mayor Hamlin Harding, a former editor of the paper, appointed him chief engineer of the Cambridge Fire Department. In 1870, the department had four assistant engineers, fifteen foremen, nine drivers, fifty-two part-time firemen, and a telegraph operator. The horse-drawn apparatus consisted of four steam fire engines and a hook and ladder truck. Over the next seven years, Raymond was able to triple the annual budget of the department, creating two new fire companies and building new firehouses on Portland Street and Western Avenue and in Brattle and Inman squares. Raymond suffered intense criticism from his rivals at the Cambridge Chronicle, but he survived eight years in office and served at the pleasure of four mayors. During his tenure he lived at 10 Pleasant Street, which was across Green Street from the City Hall of that time.

After Raymond was replaced as chief in 1878, he continued as editor and business agent of the Cambridge Press until 1890. He was elected corresponding secretary of the National Association of Fire Engineers in 1873. This means he was a contemporary of John Damrell. He was also a charter member of the John A. Logan Post, Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Civil War veterans. His nephew, Theodore Raymond, was a real estate developer and longtime civic leader. Patrick Raymond died on July 28, 1892, and was buried in Cambridge Cemetery.