

The Livermore Hook and Ladder Company, No.1, was organized on October 12, 1874 with about 30 members. They elected J.H. Mahoney president and Anton Bardellini vice-president. The company purchased a hose cart and uniforms from San Francisco. They probably at some point also bought a hook and ladder apparatus. In 1875, a two-story firehouse was built on the south side of Second Street between K and L, where the Wells Fargo parking lot is now located. They paid \$75 for a 500-pound fire bell, hung it in the cupola of the building on July 15, and broke a bottle of champagne over it. They celebrated further by sharing a "fine" keg of beer. By the end of 1881 they were down to 17 firefighters under foreman Wendell Jordan.

Apparently, another fire bell, this one weighing 1,000 pounds, was purchased and first used at the site in 1885. However, this bell, according to the drawing on the 1889 panoramic map of Livermore, hung in a high tower next to the building on Second Street now used as a town hall. The fire station was still housed in the first floor; upstairs the Justice Court met and town trustee meetings were held. The ring of the fire bell not only signaled volunteer firefighters but also served as a curfew bell to warn children to go home.

The second company in Livermore was the Niagara Fire Engine Company, No. 1, organized on July 12, 1876. By 1882 these firefighters numbered 52, with officers C.W. Bradshaw, foreman; W.S. Smith, first assistant; and Norris D. Dutcher, second assistant. Their uniform included red shirts with the num-

ber one on the front. They held their bi-monthly meetings at the town hall. The company owned a double-decker hand pumper which they purchased from the Stockton Fire Department in 1876 for \$500.

In January 1882 the town bought the firehouse and its lot for \$1,200. In October of that year, Steven's Mill was completely destroyed by fire. It was on land to the east of the Independent newspaper building. Two years later, the two original fire companies combined to form the Livermore Fire Department. The list of personnel was limited to 50, including the chief engineer, two assistant engineers, and 47 active firefighters. I had thought that the firefighters were volunteers, but their individual pay was \$12 per year, subject to fines (absence from drill \$1; absence from fire \$2). Certainly, however, not a career in which someone could become rich. In June 1889 the town bought a new hook and ladder truck that contained two ladders that could telescope to create a 45-foot ladder. The truck also included two other ladders and four hooks; the purchase price was \$650. If we could see it, this "truck" would seem strange to us—the hooks and lad-

ders rested between four wheels, and the whole outfit was pulled by hand. The old hook and ladder apparatus was sold to Pleasanton for \$200. In November the town trustees voted against buying a steam engine—the town had a problem with scarcity of water, and the cost was too high.

In 1896 a disastrous fire in downtown Livermore destroyed a tailor shop where the flames began, plus the Cosmopolitan Hotel, and Day's Livery Stable. By the next year Livermore had one hand engine, some 1,200 feet of hose, two hose carts, the hook and ladder truck, and 25 fire hydrants and a promise of five more. A number of fire extinguishers had been placed in convenient boxes around town. The introduction of electric lights that replaced gas and kerosene helped to keep the fire danger down. In 1900 the existing hydrants were not near the Valperga's cottage in the Northern Addition. The firefighters had to use a bucket brigade to extinguish the blaze at the cottage. The town had a law that firefighters could tell residents to help them. If the residents did not comply, they could be fined. I imagine that the Valpergas and their neighbors were helping with the buckets.

Do You Remember?



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Livermore Fire Department: 1874-1920, Part I

Livermore purchased the brick building on the southeast corner of McLeod and First for a town hall in 1905. In May of that year, the *Echo* published a list of the Livermore Fire Department: chief engineer, Peter J. Murray; assistant chief, Chas. E. Beck; secretary, Geo. W. Beck; foreman of engine, Geo. Beck; foreman hosecart #1, Henry Seeband; foreman hosecart #2, Ben F. Budworth; foreman hook and ladder, J.H. Dutcher, plus a contingent of 43 other men. A year later, after selling the old town hall building on Second Street to the Dania Society for \$805, the Livermore trustees used the money to finance an addition to the east side of the new town hall to house the town's fire engines. The fire department in 1906 donated its entire year pay, \$600, to the relief fund for the sufferers from the San Francisco earthquake and fire.

The Fourth of July celebration always included hose cart races. In 1901 the hose-cart tournament between Pleasanton and Livermore took place on L Street. Livermore made the fastest run but lost the \$50 prize because of its slowness in coupling the hose to the fire hydrant. In May 1910 as a part of their regular drill, three Livermore teams competed. They started at the hydrant at Fourth and J and their objective was the hydrant at First and Lizzie (now Livermore Avenue). The winning team of eight men ran 300 yards with their hose carts, let out 150 feet of hose and had water running in one minute, 17 seconds. Of course, the competitions often ended with a water free-for-all, which delighted the audience.

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