



OLD BRODERICK FINALLY FOUND ITS WAY HOME

In 1891 a preliminary meeting to form a volunteer fire brigade in Vernon was held on the evening of May 11th at 8:00 p.m. at the home of Mr. C. Cornell. The small but enthusiastic group quickly organized themselves into various committees to attend to such matters as writing by-laws and soliciting membership.

A few days later, on May 14th the first edition of the Vernon News recorded the meetings humble proceedings by stating, "The necessity of establishing a fire brigade in this town must be so patent to every resident that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon it, and it is sincerely to be hoped that everybody will contribute something (however little) to show his appreciation of the endeavors now being made to form one."

Indeed, there was plenty of enthusiasm for a fire brigade during the initial months of its formation. However, later, in February of 1892 the Vernon News had this to report on the fledgling outfit: "... at present it does not even own a single water-bucket or an inch of hose-which in the event of a fire would in all probability prove more useful than lengthy by-laws."

Through the spring and summer of 1892 the Vernon Volunteer Fire Brigade (V.V.F.B.) with minimal equipment, battled a number of brush and grass fires in and around the town along with a few chimney fires all of which had the potential to end in disaster were it not for the sheer manpower available to "stamp out" the flames. Not surprisingly, by 1893, the brigade and city council seriously began the process of looking for something more effective than buckets. They wanted a "fire engine" (a rather loose term for a pumper that was pulled through the streets by hand and pumped by hand).

In July of 1894, after considering several options for new engines (some with \$1,300.00 price tags) from suppliers in eastern Canada, the City of Vernon decided to purchase a used hand-pump engine and 500 feet of hose from the town of Yale for the bargain price of \$350.00. The engine, or pumper, known as Broderick No. 1, originally came from San Francisco. (The engine was named after David C. Broderick, a U.S. Senator and former foreman of one San Francisco's first volunteer fire companies. Broderick was a former New Yorker and an opponent of slavery. He was killed in 1859 in a duel with State Supreme Court Justice David Terry, a Southern partisan). According to the Inland Sentinel Newspaper out of Kamloops, the town of Yale had purchased the pumper in 1882 for \$1,050.00.

Now, here is where the story gets even more interesting. During my research on the pumper I discovered that Broderick No. 1 was the first fire engine to be built in California. Any previous engines required by fire brigades in the state were built by factories in the eastern U.S. and shipped around the Horn.

Old Broderick, as it came to be known, was designed and constructed in 1855 by William E. Worth of San Francisco. The pumper was built for Empire Engine Company No. 1, the first volunteer fire brigade in the city. (In 1855/56 there were 17 departments in San Francisco and 940 firemen. Empire Engine Company No 1. had 50 members).

Apart from being the first fire engine built in the state it was also unique for its pump design. Within a series of articles written for the Book Club of California in 1961 titled Early California Firehouses and Equipment there is a description of Old Broderick that says, "The new engine was to be of elegant design and superior strength with a weight of some 3,000 pounds. Two eight-and-one-half-inch cylinders fitted with patent air-discharging valves invented by Mr. Worth would enable it to throw two streams of water...its box was to be built of tamanu, a rare wood from the South Seas."

The Fireman's Journal for 1855 recorded the initial testing of Old Broderick shortly after its delivery and reported that the new pump was able to send a stream of water through a one-inch nozzle 25 feet over Wells, Fargo and Company's building.

When the engine was sold to Yale in 1882 it was replaced with a newer steam model. That means Old Broderick was already 27 years old when Yale bought it and pushing 40 years by the time it arrived in Vernon (no wonder it was a good deal).

Anyway, Broderick No. 1 arrived in Vernon in August of 1894 (It cost \$52.80 to ship the engine from Yale). Shortly after its arrival the V.V.F.B. also received another 200 feet of hose from Ontario. Axes, additional buckets and a new ladder wagon were also added to the brigade's growing list of much needed equipment.

In January of 1896, the Vernon News reported that city council members were becoming concerned for the overall condition of the pumper. A dedicated fire hall had yet to be erected in the city and Old Broderick was kept in a private workshop where cold winter temperatures resulted in the pump and fittings to freeze-up on several occasions. A lit kerosene lamp was kept under the pumper during severe cold spells but this was proving to be a dangerous option when left unattended. As the year progressed, Old Broderick was beginning to show its age and not working as well as it should.

A number of large structure fires in the city during 1897 and 1898, including the destruction of the Vernon News building taxed Old Broderick to its limit. The city's water supply and hydrant system were upgraded and the V.V.F.B. began to rely more on fighting fires with hoses attached directly to city hydrants and the use of hose reels for getting lengths of hose to the fire.

In June of 1904 the Vernon News refers to Old Broderick as being "too antique" and later in August the 49-year old pumper was sold to H.C. Stillingfleet of Kelowna for \$90.00.

Old Broderick eventually wound up languishing out its years in Kelowna's City Park and remained a fixture there up until 1947 when it was spotted by a vacationing volunteer fireman from Daly City just south of San Francisco. The fireman, a bit of a history buff, recognized Old Broderick and reported his find to the San Francisco branch of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. Knowing the significant role the pumper played in California's history the company purchased Old Broderick from the City of Kelowna and brought it back to San Francisco to much pomp and ceremony.

Old Broderick was fully restored and placed in the lobby of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company's home office in San Francisco when it opened in 1957. Ironically, David C. Broderick, the pumper's namesake, is buried nearby.

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