

HISTORY OF SANTA CLARA'S FIRE DEPARTMENT

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The establishment of volunteer fire protection came early in the growth of the fledgling town of Santa Clara. Starting with a small company and poor equipment, it passed through many changes. The first move toward the organization of a fire company was made on October 5, 1855, when a number of well-known citizens met at the old Union Hotel and organized the Tiger Engine Company. The following were elected as officers: Foreman, V. C. Riche; Assistant, William Fosgate; Second Assistant, A. C. Riche; Secretary, Henry D. McCobb; Treasurer, Abram Madan.

The original equipment of this company was a dilapidated old hose cart and a number of buckets. The progressive young men soon realized that this was inadequate and set to work to procure the most modern engine possible. A committee was appointed to raise funds toward the new engine. In aid of the enterprise, the Jesuit Fathers of Santa Clara College gave a musical and literary entertainment on April 22, 1856. The tickets sold at \$1.00, and the house was packed, many people from San Jose being present. The Tiger, clad in their new uniforms, escorted the San Jose Fire Department to the Hall in a body. There is no record of the amount realized from this entertainment, but it must have been very handsome. Four days after the concert, April 26th, the company met in special meeting and tendered its thanks to the "president, teachers, and pupils of Santa Clara College; the Empire Company NO. 1 and the Hook and Ladder Company of San Jose, and to the citizens of San Jose, particularly the ladies," for their various good offices in making the entertainment a success.¹

A committee of V. C. Riche and Captain John West was appointed on June 19th, 1856, to go to San Francisco and purchase an engine and hose at a cost not to exceed \$1500. At a called meeting on June 28th, this committee reported that no engine could be procured in the city, but that one was to be sold at auction at Oakland the following Monday. They were instructed to purchase this engine if it could be had at the price fixed by the company, otherwise they were to continue their search in the city. Three days later, July 1st, 1856, the engine arrived in Santa Clara. John H. Dibble, an old member of the company is authority for the statement that the engine was purchased from the old Columbian Engine Company of San Francisco.²

On July 2nd, a meeting was called, and it was enthusiastically decided to celebrate the arrival of the engine on the National Holiday, July 4th. The boys met 7 o'clock on July 4th to give the engine a preliminary trial. In the afternoon, the engine, gaily decorated, was taken to San Jose by the fire laddies, where a grand celebration was being held.³

The following day, July 5th, the name of the company was changed to the Columbian Engine Company No. 1 and it remained until officially disbanded in 1880.

COLUMBIAN ENGINE COMPANY NO. 1

The next work of the fire fighters was to built an engine house. After some months delay, a lot was purchased and a structure was erected. The original location was on Washington near Lexington Street. Mr. Arquello purchased this lot from the company some years later and the original structure was moved to a new site on Washington, between Liberty and Franklin Streets.

It was not until October 6, 1875, that the Constitution of the Columbian Engine Company No. 1 was passed. With the sole intention of providing efficient fire protection to the City, the constitution included as part of its writings, the Bylaws specified the duties for its members. The duties are as follows: "Each member who may be within 400 yards of the Engine House shall, upon the alarm of fire, proceed with all possible dispatch thereto and assist in conveying the machinery or apparatus to the fire. Members who may be outside the distance named, may proceed directly towards the district designated by the bell and join their company as early as possible and shall perform such duties as the officer may require or direct, but should the alarm prove to be unfounded, they shall never-the-less be under the control of the officer the same as though a fire had occurred and when ordered by the proper officer, the member shall assist in taking up the hose etc., and proceed in regular order to the engine house and after the roll call be at liberty to depart."⁴

ROLL CALL

Member answer to his name and no other.

Roll call can be called at the fire.

Any person removing any equipment or apparatus except in time of fire shall be fined \$5.00.

UNIFORM

The uniform of this company shall consist of a red shirt, dark Pantaloons, blue cap trimmed with red and black patent leather frontpiece, with name of company designated thereon, black belt with gold lettering and a metal badge, the latter worn on the left breast at all times when on active duty, under penalty of 50¢ for each violation.

DUTY OF FOREMAN

Preside at meetings.

Examine apparatus at least once a month.

Direct operations at fire.

Levy fines.

Has power to call out company for parades.

TREASURE BOND

\$200.00 gold coin.

FINES

Foreman for neglect of duty	\$2.00
Member for refusing to do parade duty	.50
Member for disobeying orders	1.00
Member for refusing to do drill duty	.50
Member for non-attendance at a fire	.50
Member for non-attendance at an alarm	.25
Member for non-attendance at a regular meeting	.25
Member refusing to assist taking apparatus to or from a fire	5.00

For many years, the Columbias were the only fire company and they and the engine performed well in many a battle against fire. In the course of time, the need for a hook and ladder became apparent and in 1871, Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 was organized. Next came the Babcock Engine Company, organized in 1875, followed by the Tanners' Hose Company in 1878. The Hope Hose Company was formed after the Columbias disbanded in 1880 and around 1880, the Mission Hose Company was formed.

HOOK AND LADDER COMPANY NO. 1

The first auxilliary company to be formed was the Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, which was organized during 1871. Henry

Brothers was the first foreman. The hook and ladder truck was furnished by the Town Board of Trustees. The fire fighters set to work to erect a building to house the truck. The early records of this company are missing, so that no positive information is available, but it seems that about February 1782, the building was finished and the truck moved into its new quarters.⁵

The building located on Liberty Street between Lafayette and Washington, was 30 feet wide and 60 feet deep and was divided into two rooms. The first room contained the hook and ladder truck and in the rear was a large meeting room which the fireman outfitted, at their own expense, as a club house.

The engine, in use in 1894, was built from the truck of the Babcock engine and contained a full complement of ladders including the latest model extension ladder. The former truck was discarded because of its weight.

HOSE BRIGADE

The Hose Brigade was the direct successor of the Babcock Fire Brigade, which was organized during May 1875. The officers were: E. V. Thorn, Foreman; E. H. Terry, First Assistant; A. F. Harlow, Second Assistant; J. J. Hyde, Secretary and A. V. Fatjo, Treasurer. The fire fighters started with a combination Babcock Hook and Ladder truck, which was housed in the Pierce Building at the corner of Main and Liberty. The Babcock Brigade, after various problems, disbanded on June 25, 1881. On August 19th, a meeting was held at Robert Menzel's hardware store to organize a new company. On September 27th, 1881, the name of Hose Brigade was adopted. Pending the

purchase of a new hose cart by the Town, the company agreed to accept the old Babcock truck.

The new cart was received was received on November 13, 1881 and housed in what was formerly the City jail, adjoining the new Town Hall on Benton Street between Main and Jackson. The fire bell was atop a wooden tower behind the old jail and City Hall. The officers in 1894 were: W. J. Fosgate, Foreman; Fred Alderman, First Assistant; D. J. Flannery, Second Assistant; E. S. Wright, Secretary; and J. B. O'Brien, Treasurer.

The old Babcock truck was called into service on August 9, 1877, when an attempt was made to burn out the Chinatown area of Santa Clara. Chinese laborers, who had been brought in during the founding of the Block Fruit Company, were quartered on Gould Street. The deliberately set fire engulfed Patterson's Paint Shop, Simpson's Blacksmith Shop and several Chinese quarters before finally being brought under control.⁶

TANNERS' HOSE COMPANY

This company was organized in 1878 from among the employees of the Santa Clara Tannery. The hose cart and 500 feet of hose were purchased by Jacob Eberhard and were originally intended for use in the tannery only. The first foreman of the company was Frank Emig, his assistant was Henry Zepperlein and the secretary was William Klein.

For many years, the cart was housed in a small building barely large enough to hold it. The company meetings were held in the dining room of the Tannery boarding house. In August 1888, a new structure was built on the Alameda at the corner of Santa

Clara Street. Jacob Eberhard contributed the lot and paid for the construction while the Pacific Milling Company donated the lumber. The Town Trustees donated the bell, since the company had joined the Town Fire Department in the meantime.

The new building was opened October 8, 1888. The building was 25 feet wide by 50 feet long and was divided into two rooms. The first room housed the hose cart and other items needed in fire fighting. The second room was used as a large meeting room, and was used by the members as a club room.⁷

The officers in 1894 were: John Kilcoyne, Foreman; William Roggie, First Assistant; John J. Eberhard, Second Assistant; George Gerhardt, Secretary; Theodore Hoffman, Treasurer; and Emil Viagini, Librarian.

HOPE HOSE COMPANY

The Columbia Engine Company disbanded on June 2, 1880. A meeting was held on June 8, of the old members, and they decided to reorganize. The name of Santa Clara Hose Company was chosen. This name stood until November 21, 1881, when it was decided to change the name to the Hope Hose Company. The first officers were: Foreman, H. El Hazelton; First Assistant, J. B. Moulin; Second Assistant, W. South; Secretary, George Seifert; and Treasurer, A. Sweitzer.

The Company building was located at 920 Washington between Franklin and Liberty Streets. It was 25 feet wide by 75 feet long, a bell tower on top, and it was divided into three rooms. The first room faced the street and contained the hose cart and other fire fighting apparatus. The second room was outfitted as a club

room with card tables and the other club room contained a billiard table, a desk and the records of the company. This latter room was the site for business meetings of the company. This firehouse was sold to the Kifer family, who removed the bell tower and used the building as a cottage. The company then moved to Menzel's Garage at 1049 Washington.

The Menzel brothers were Santa Clara businessmen and members of the volunteer fire department. Henry and Frank Menzel owned the garage and George worked in the hardware store. Henry Menzel was also a master plumber and served as Fire Chief from 1919 to 1912.

Frank Menzel invented a self-starting device for the 1913 Seagraves Chemical Truck housed in the garage. When the noon whistle at the waterworks was activated by the clock in the firehouse, which was connected to the alarm system, the motor on the fire truck would start automatically. It was a reliable device and never failed to start. The Menzel brothers repaired the truck and they washed the hoses and loaded the truck with the dry hose.⁸

At night the volunteer firemen slept over the garage loft. There was no fire pole in the garage. Some years later, a phone was installed with a horn downstairs to awaken the men.

MISSION HOSE COMPANY

Little is recorded of the Mission Hose company. It was formed 1877 and located on Madison Street in what was known as the Pereria Block, bounded by Madison, Monroe, Market and Bellomy. Shorty Pereria was chief of that district according to John Andrade. The Mission Hose Company was one of the five fire companies that eventually merged into one volunteer fire department.

Between the years of 1904 and 1908, the individual companies merged to form one fire department. It was agreed that the five companies would stay in their present locations. With the merger, further thought was given to providing more efficient fire protection to the people of Santa Clara. It was decided to form four districts which were to use Main Street to divide East from West and Franklin Street to divide North from South. District 1 was that portion of the town North of Franklin and West of Main to the town limits. District 2 Was North of Franklin and East of Main to the town limit. District 3 was South of Franklin and East of Main while District 4 was South of Franklin and West of Main.

A system was set up of responding to alarms. The special notice regarding the alarm system read as follows: "Persons tapping an alarm of fire will observe the following. Twelve taps given in rapid succession, constitutes an alarm of fire after which, the number to the district must be given by tapping the bell between each alarm, the number of taps corresponding with the number of the district for which the alarm is being given."⁹

In 1913, the town purchased its first motor driven fire engine. This piece of equipment was classed as a Chemical wagon and was purchased from the Seagraves Company for \$5,500. It carried 1,000 feet of 2½ inch cotton jacket rubber lined hose, two 25-gallon tanks of soda and acid chemical extinguishers and 200 feet of 1 inch rubber hose and nozzle. Water was obtained solely from hydrant pressure. In contrast, a more modern America La France of the 1960's had 1500 feet of hose, its own water supply and pumped 1,500 gallons of water a minute.

1921 saw the purchase of a Model T Ford hook and ladder truck. The Town purchased its first motor driven pumper, an Ahrens-Fox, in 1927. This equipment was used to fight an oil fire at the Eberhard Tannery on July 10, 1935, and again on October 11, 1937, to fight a fire which destroyed the 74-year old Baptist Church at 1275 Benton Street. Ex-fireman John M. Andrade recalls that the noontime fire started as a result of a run-away trash fire in the backyard. In 1941, the fire department expanded even further with the purchase of a white combination ladder and pumper engine truck from the Seagraves Company.

These volunteer fire fighters were unpaid but were intensely proud of their service on behalf of their Town. There was a friendly but very serious rivalry among the volunteer fire companies. Holiday weekends such as Independence Day and Columbus Day featured parades in which the fire department participated. The company rivalry was climaxed by hose races for which each company had practiced for weeks.

Six men had to unwind 150 feet of hose in three pieces and connect it to a hydrant. The events were timed until the water flowed. In 1900, one company won with a 38 second clocking. In 1949, the Hope Hose Company won the race in 21 seconds.¹⁰

Much of the vitality of the volunteer companies came from frequent social activities. They greatly enjoyed barbeques, beer busts and card parties. The Santa Clara Fire Department owned a ranch in the Santa Cruz mountains which served as the gathering spot for firefighters social functions. During the Prohibition Era, it was a place to drink. Beer was scarce but homemade wine enlivened many a barbeque.

A milestone came about in 1949 with the hiring of the City's first paid fire fighting force. These six "pioneers" were Emil Flosi, Jess A. Rogers, George T. Koop, Leonard J. George, Frank R. Toledo and John M. Andrade. They were appointed^{to} a six months' probationary period.

Five of the six men hired^{were} Volunteer Fireman. Emil Flosi was a police officer in the San Jose Police Department. Koop, Toledo and Andrade were members of the old Hope Hose Company volunteers. Chief Leonard J. George was a member of the Tanners' Hose Company while Fire Marshall Jess Rogers was a member of the Mission Hose Company. 11

The six men were assigned to work 24 hours and 72 hours a week, in "A" and "B" shifts. The men worked 16 hours of one day and 8 hours of the next morning, and the shift change was 8:00 A.M. every morning. "A" shift was the first crew to start duty on March 1, 1949. That first crew consisted of Captain Koop, John Andrade and Frank Toledo. The crews had one working day off every 72 hours.

Both crews started at the new fire house completed on March 1, 1949. The new fire house was headquarters for both the paid personnel and the Volunteers and was located on the corner of Benton and Main Streets. The City, at this time, had four fire trucks in the department. Two of the trucks were actually in service. The Model T Ford was a parade relic and the old Seagraves Chemical truck was on stand-by duty. The two trucks actually in service at this time were the 1927 Ahrens-Fox pumper and the 1941 model Seagraves ladder and pumper truck.

As with many other segments of Santa Clara's development, the population growth of the 1950's and 60's brought about many

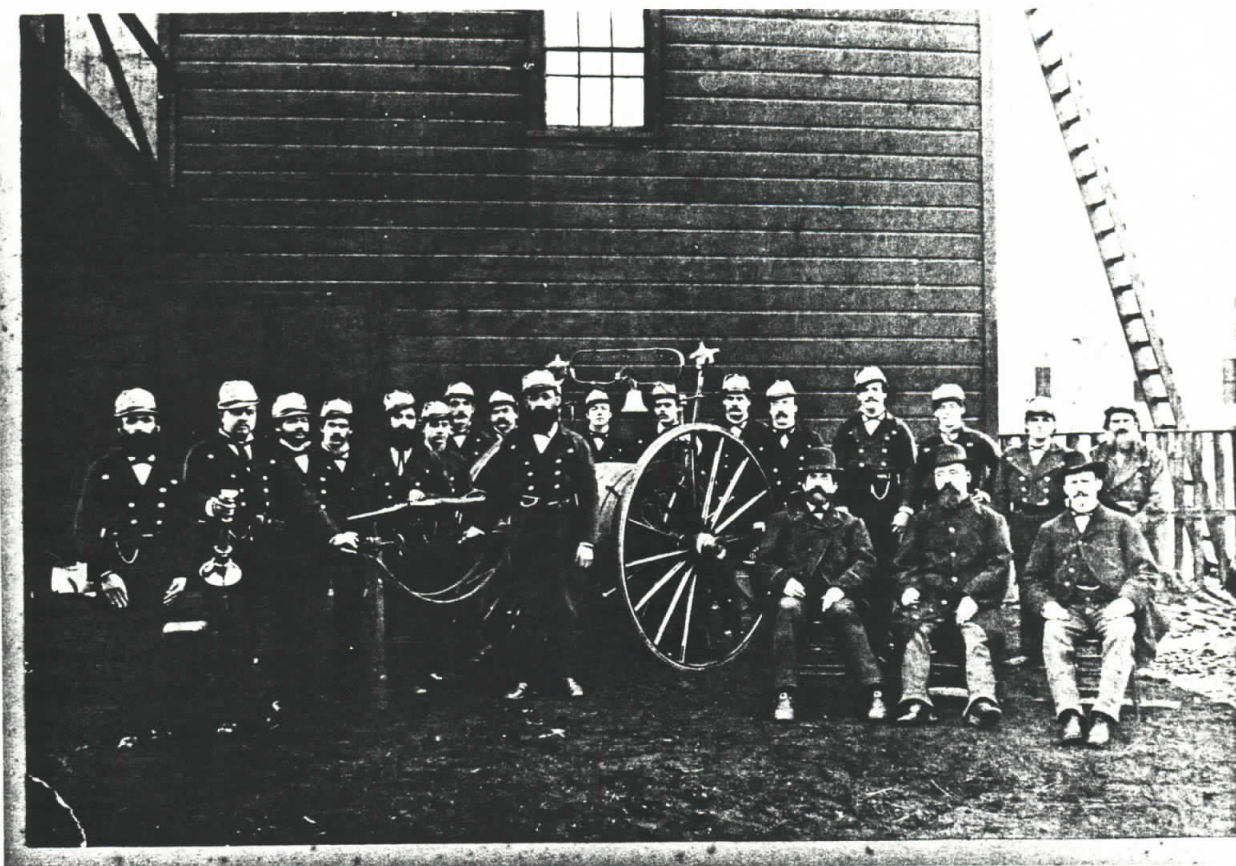
further changes in the saga of Santa Clara's Fire Department. On June 3, 1951, Leonard George became the first paid City Fire Chief. 1953 saw the construction of a second fire station at Lafayette Street and Kifer Road, and two 1000 gallon pumpers and a 75 foot aerial ladder truck were purchased. The third fire station was built in 1954 on Homestead Road near Kiely Blvd, and a fourth station was erected in 1958 on Pruneridge Avenue near Saratoga Avenue, and another 1000 gallon America La France pumper was bought. In 1961, a sixth station was constructed on the corner of Bowers and Mark Avenue. Three 1250 gallon America LaFrance pumpers were also purchased as replacement equipment in 1961.

In the span of 130 years, Santa Clara's Fire Department has grown from one volunteer fire company to a department with 135 paid men, nine fire stations, about twenty pieces of modern fire fighting equipment, and a volunteer department of five companies and 75 members.

FORMER CHIEFS OF THE SANTA CLARA FIRE DEPT.

FREDERICK CHRISTIAN FRANCK, I.....1855 to 1856
V. C. RICHE.....1856 to 1860
JOHN H. DIBBLE.....1860
NO RECORDS.....1860 to 1909
HENRY MENZEL.....1910 to 1912
WILLIAM LOOS.....1912 to 1913
D. WALSH.....1913 to 1914
WILLIAM LOOS.....1914 to 1916
AUGUST ROLL.....1916 to 1919

A. W. SALLOWS.....1919 to 1921
C. C. QUINN.....1921 to 1934
WILLIAM STOUT.....1934 to 1936
JOSEPH LA HERRAN.....1936 to 1951
LEONARD J. GEORGE.....1951 to 1975
DONALD VISCONTI.....1975 to 1986



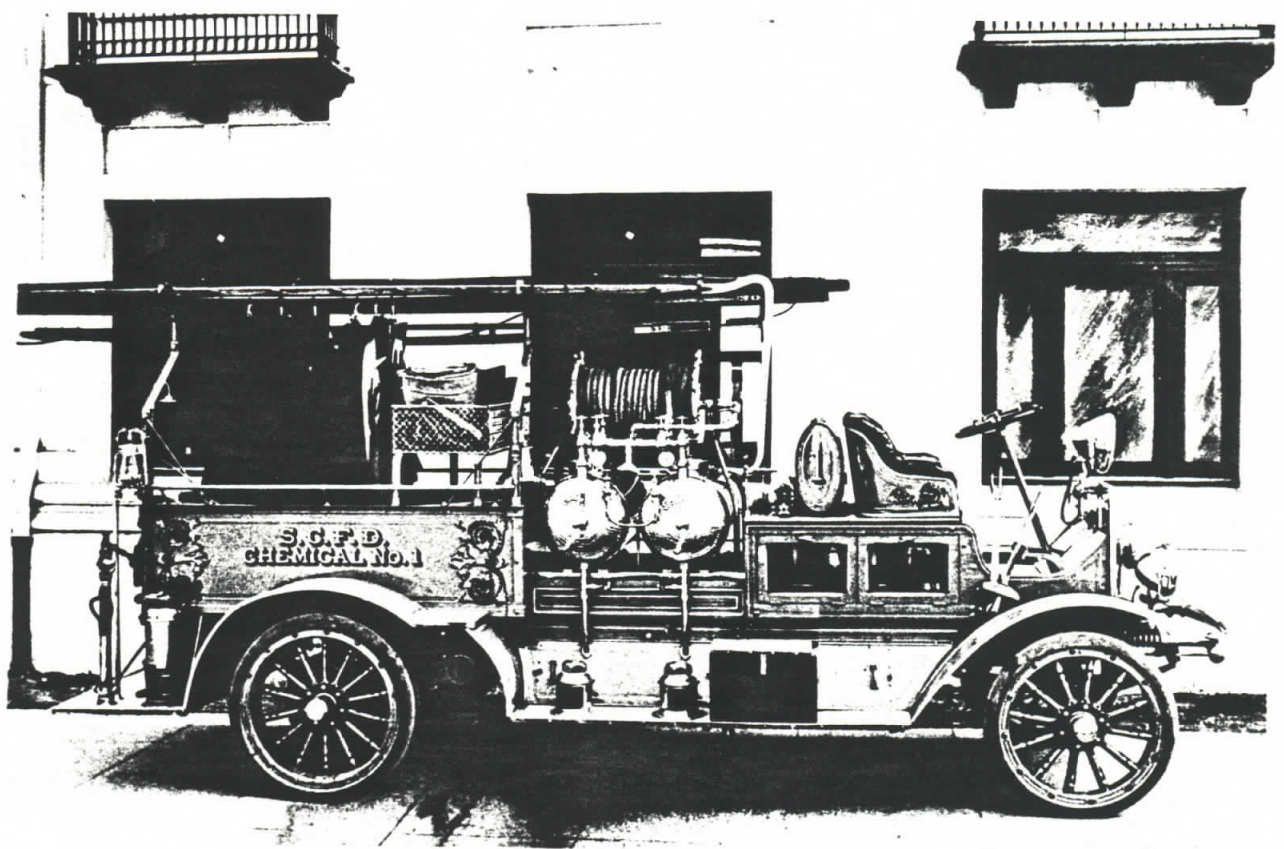
Early unidentified Hose Company



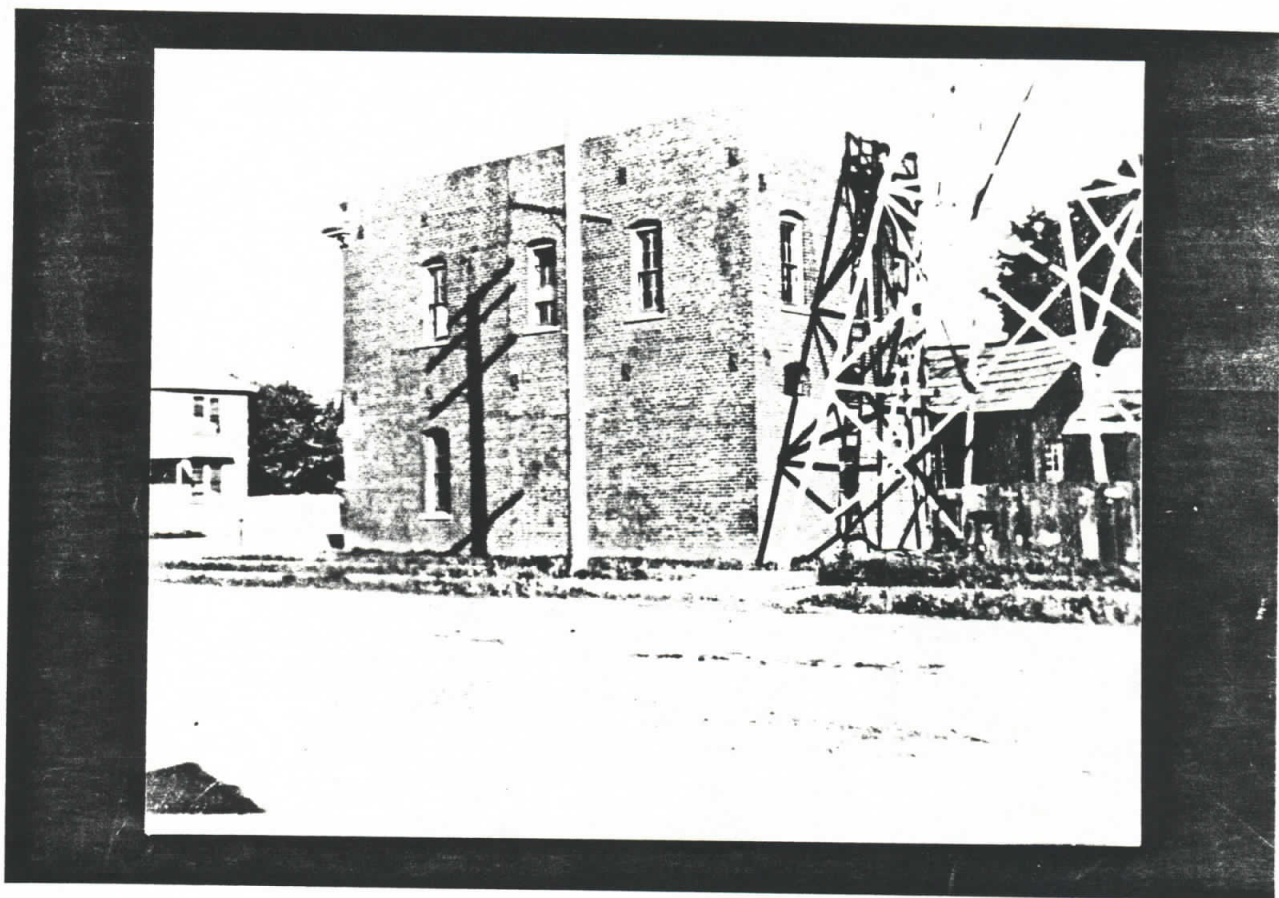
Early Hose Company - may be a combination. Note the different uniforms. Some are wearing the uniform described for the Columbian Engine Company, which included red shirt, dark pants, black belt and a metal badge worn on the left breast.



Cherry Carnival Auto Parade - May 24, 1913. Note that the Seagraves Chemical Engine No. 1 in the front.



1913 SEAGRAVES CHEMICAL WAGON



City Hall and jail with the fire tower behind.



HOSE COMPANY — Fire volunteers from Hope Hose Company posed in 1913 behind the "new" Seagraves fire-engine. On the seat are Frank Menzel, mechanic, and Dave Walsh, a shoemaker. Standing (from left) are Tom Maloney, constable; Bill Condon; Les Folsom; Ally Sallows, fire chief; an unidentified man and Jack Venegas. Shown standing on the running board, (from left), are Joe Robidoux, Bill Nace, Chickeets Carrera, com-

pany chief; Pete Ramon and Charlie Haight. Sitting on the running board, (from left), are Bili Loos, fire chief; Rick Wright, policeman; and Joe Scanlon, mortician. On the ground, are, (from left), Dick Kifer, rancher; Oscar Durell, Emil Biagini, Martin Miller, Barry Moriarty and Shorty Penner, Mission Hose fire chief.

FOOTNOTES

¹Santa Clara Index. The Volunteer Boys - History of Santa Clara's Fire Department, Saturday, January 13, 1894.

²IBID

³IBID

⁴Visconti, Donald. Santa Clara Fire Department, 1966.

⁵OP CIT - Santa Clara Index

⁶OP CIT - Visconti, Donald

⁷OP CIT - Santa Clara Index

⁸Andrade, John M. History of Santa Clara Fire Department.

⁹OP CIT - Visconti, Donald

¹⁰Santa Clara Journal. Firemen Recall Colorful History, Wednesday, July 31, 1968.

¹¹IBID

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Santa Clara Journal, Fireman Recall Colorful History, Wednesday, July, 31, 1968.

Visconti, Donald. Santa Clara Fire Department, 1966.

Conversation with exfiremen John Andrade and Joseph Rebeiro.