

Fire-Fighting Apparatus

1930 Mack open-cab antique fire truck on display in front of Valley Fire Equipment in Bradford, NH.



FIRE APPARATUS

By Charles B. Fletcher

The station is still, the hour is past midnight, firefighters are resting, and an alarm sounds. Firefighters pull on boots, pants and perhaps sweatshirts. To the apparatus floor they go, as turn out coats and helmets complete their attire. Apparatus, until a few minutes ago sitting dormant, is now running, doors open. Men and machine respond to another incident.

Those who fight the nation's fires are a special breed of people, dedicated to the organizations and communities they serve. Fire companies were started many years ago by insurance companies to protect properties they insured. Most started with a bucket brigade, then advanced to hand-operated pumps, and then, along came the steam engines.

In the early days of fire fighting it was common to find items that were built locally. A prime example can be found at the Claremont Fire Department, where an old hand operated pump is on exhibit. It was built in 1800 by a gentleman named Abraham Fisher. In the book The History of Claremont, written by Waite, there is mentioned an Abraham Fisher, who was a cabinet maker at that time. I am under the impression he was the builder of the pump.

From the beginning to the present day, activities of fire departments have evolved from just fighting fires to becoming trained and organized, doing fire prevention, preplanning, code enforcement, water rescue, natural disasters, handling hazardous materials, public assists, medical emergencies, and mutual aid along with all sorts of fire suppression. To accomplish these tasks they depend on special types of apparatus known by most as fire trucks, but to the fire service as pumpers, tankers, aerial ladders and platforms, brush trucks, utility vehicles, rescue trucks, and other specialized wheeled vehicles such as a quint (provides five functions: pump, water tank, fire hose, ground ladders and an aerial device).



200 Year-old hand pump at Claremont Fire Dept.

Fire-Fighting Apparatus



Wilmot, NH - Fire and Rescue truck with double cab serves multiple purposes for a small town.

Fire apparatus comes in many shapes and sizes. Most are manufactured by large companies located all around the United States. If you are interested in purchasing from them, you have to contact a salesman who will come to your department and sit down to talk size, chassis, and capacity of the pump. Or perhaps you need an aerial platform or ladder. The salesman will take your request and figure a price, then you either purchase the equipment or not. If your department wants to purchase or have existing equipment refurbished locally, two locations come to mind, one in Cornish; or you might take a ride to Bradford, NH. Just outside of the town, located on Route 114, you can find the Valley Fire Equipment Company. It is easy to find: just look for the old open cab 1930 Mack fire truck attached to a hydrant on the front lawn, right under Old Glory proudly flying in the breeze.

Valley Fire Equipment Company co-owners Preston Starr and Mark Goldberg have built the business to what it is today, a very efficient modern manufacturing facility. They and their eight employees have the expertise to bring in a chassis and build to your specifications, along with NFPA guidelines, apparatus that fits your needs.

I was told that this year the business was about fifty-fifty between building new apparatus and refurbishing existing apparatus. I was impressed with the neatness of the building; it seems that everyone takes pride in keeping their work areas picked up and clean.

To manufacture and maintain fire apparatus takes a working knowledge of engines, hydraulics, sheet-metal, welding and weights. Apparatus rusts, water tanks need to be replaced, the pumps that receive the water and pumps it to the incident must be repaired, and aerial ladders need to be tested, and the hydraulics checked. New materials such as polypropylene must be tested and evaluated. This material, from what I can gather, is the up-coming material because it will not rust and is really simple to repair.

Suppose you were a fire chief and wanted to purchase a new pumper for your department. You must make many decisions, starting with



Water Pump to be installed.

Fire-Fighting Apparatus



Engine 3, Bradford Fire Department, ready to roll.

what type of chassis you require, rear wheel drive or all wheel drive, how much weight should it carry? Mid ship fire pump or front end pump, what capacity in gallons per minute do you require? How many firefighters will be riding on the apparatus? If you are with a city fire department, you probably want a large cab, whereas if you are a rural department, perhaps a small cab will suffice. How many gallons should the on-board water supply contain? If your department usually hooks to a city water supply (hydrants), perhaps you can get by with a smaller water tank; but if you are a rural department you probably need a larger water tank. How many pre-connected hose lines and what size do you need (fire hose that is hooked up to the fire pump)? How much large diameter hose should you carry to be used for a supply line? Do you require a foam system? What type of doors do you want installed on the cabinets, roll-up or hinged outward. There are many questions a potential buyer must consider, and the manufacturer will help you make the right decisions.

Times change. I can remember when I first joined the Claremont Fire Department. We usually rolled with three apparatus; the first would be a pumper set up at the incident, the and a second pumper would lay a supply line,

then go back and pump from the hydrant or whatever water supply we used, maybe a pond or a river. The third was an aerial, either a ladder or a snorkel which usually arrived at the front of the building to set up. In today's fire service a quint can do many of these functions. What must be remembered is that all the fire apparatus in the world can do nothing but sit in a fire station, without the necessary well-trained and dedicated firefighters needed to accomplish the job.

An interesting note: if Bradford should have a fire during the working day, all activity at the Valley Fire Equipment Company comes to a halt. Co-owners become Chief Goldberg and Deputy Chief Starr. I was told that about ninety percent of the employees are affiliated with local fire departments.

I would like to thank Mr. Mark Goldberg for taking time to spend with me and for showing me around the Valley Fire Equipment facility.

