

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 11, 1951

A Fire Chief Reports

In September of 1950 the Diary reported the early history of Monterey Hose Company, No. 1. Today we have received the report of the chief engineer of the Monterey Fire Department dated February 15, 1892. We are grateful to Capt. Herb Bispo for the information contained in both these items. It was Capt. Bispo who rescued these historical documents from destruction by fire when a former fire chief was "cleaning up." That chief was not W.E. Parker or Gregory Teaby, the present chief.

The report is addressed to "The Honorable Board of Trustees of the City of Monterey:

"Gentlemen:

"I herewith submit to you my first report as chief engineer of the Monterey Fire Department, which is a complete record of the department with such other information as may be deemed of interest from the date of organization (March 4, 1890) to Dec. 31, 1891.

Apparatus, etc.

Hose-carriage, hose, etc.; present value, \$750.

Hook and ladder truck, etc., present value, \$400.

Hose house, furniture, bell – present value, \$350. Total \$1,500.

New supplies purchased

Total cost of supplies purchased since organization, \$84.60.

Current Expenses

Ground rent Hose House for 1890, \$18.

Ground Rent Hose House for 1891, \$24.

Rent of House for Hook and Ladder, \$92.

Refund on Poll Tax to Firemen, \$44.

Repairs on apparatus, \$11.50.

Repairs on hydrants, \$5.25. Total \$194.75.

Chief Parker reported that expense to the city of maintaining the fire department, since the organization, including the remodeling and equipping of H. & L. Truck, was \$495.36.

Hose Company No. 1 had 20 members and three officers at the time the chief made his report. The board of fire delegates consisted of 11 members, duly elected. There were three executive officers on the department – a chief and first and second chiefs.

The chief also reported that both companies were drilled as frequently as circumstances would permit.

Chief Parker wrote in "Fire Record": "It is my good fortune to be able to report very light fire losses. The total loss by fire since the organization of the department has not exceeded \$2,000, includes the two fires in New Monterey. We cannot long expect such exemption from conflagrations as has been our past experience. The continual increase in frame buildings, necessarily increases the liability for fires, hence the need of better apparatus in the future."

Under the heading "Causes of Fires and Alarms" the chief listed: Burning flues, 3; supposed incendiary, 2; lamp explosions, 2; false alarms, 2; and sparks from chimney, 1; total 10.

We learn from the report that the department had 550 feet of hose in good condition in 1892. The chief recommended that 300 or 400 feet of cotton hose be purchased at once. He declared that with the small amount of hose then on hand and the limited number of hydrants and their great distance apart, the fire department was practically helpless. He called the attention of the trustees to the fact that during the past three years the territory to be covered by the department had been greatly enlarged by the building up of New Monterey and Oak Grove; also that during the same time the number of new frame buildings to be protected had doubled.

This sounds as though it might have been written in 1951 instead of 59 years ago. Chief Parker wrote: "Another reason why there should be more hose is that after a hose has been used it must be dried and cleaned, which takes several hours, and during this time there should be extra hose to put on the reel, instead of leaving it empty as we are compelled to do now." Of course now the department does have extra hose and all is well.

Parker reported that there were 11 hydrants which covered only a portion of the city. The chief recommended that the city place a number each year. "There are several residence blocks on which owners pay taxes, that there are no hydrants within reach," he

wrote. There were then eight blocks on Main street (Calle Principal) west to Larkin and between Scott and Madison streets that were unprotected in 1892.

Chief Parker closed his report with the appeal, "As this matter is of great importance to the taxpayers, I would respectfully urge that some action be taken as early as possible."

It was on September 12, 1910, that the Monterey city trustees awarded a contract for the Calle Principal fire house to C.W. Day for his bid of slightly over \$6,500.