

August 24, 1961

The Old Grey Mare

"The Old Grey Mare," Monterey's first fire engine, was purchased by the City of Monterey in the early 1900's at a cost of \$9,500. This old chain-driven Seagrave is still in service on a standby basis in the New Monterey fire station, but it was predicted in 1955 that it would soon be regulated to the status of a museum piece.

The fire engine was grey in color in those days and so acquired the nickname, "The Old Grey Mare." Now it is the bright red of the other fire fighting equipment, beautiful and shiny.

Before the "Grey Mare" was purchased, the city had handcarts and a hook and ladder rig to be drawn by horses. But the city never purchased horses to draw it. When a fire started, the firemen would pull the various pieces of equipment and men would come running from everywhere to give help. Sometimes they would hook to the streetcar and sometimes to beer wagons which were equipped with powerful horses.

In 1950 we were privileged to read the blotter and minute book of Monterey Hose Company No. 1 of 1891. On the date of February 2nd of that year we noted that the committee was appointed by the foreman to procure a desk, No. 105 1/2 in a catalogue, for \$50.

The contract for printing was awarded to W. Kay. It was moved, seconded, and carried to obtain two pedestals and two platforms for the foreman and first assistant, to be placed at either end of the firemen's room. But the book ends without any notation regarding the pedestals, so we presume they were not purchased.

It was also moved at the same meeting that the committee obtain four spittoons for "the benefit of the tobacco chewers" and that the limit of amount for the two pedestals, two platforms and the four spittoons be \$20. The motion was lost, and the secretary instructed to strike out that part of the motion that applied to the cuspidors. After some discussion it was moved to adjourn. Carried.

In March 1891 J. A. Girardin was foreman and the desk committee had the desk on hand. The secretary was instructed to purchase gloves to supply all members before the July 4 celebration. An invitation to participate in the celebration was accepted from the Watsonville Fire Department. A recess was called to

discuss helmets and a committee appointed to secure suitable helmets for the company - 18 in number. But it was finally discovered that they could not be procured on time.

Again on April 4 the matter of procuring cuspidors, with the number raised to six, and in addition to the platforms and pedestals, a chair for the presiding officer — limit of \$20 — was ordered. It was also moved that the company have new uniforms before July 4. A bill for the cuspidors, costing \$2.50, was presented by W. E. Parker. By June 6th a chair had been procured for \$5 and the platforms had been installed.

Ed Page was elected captain of the running team for July 4. Members were asked to turn in their red shirts and cape as soon as possible, that they might be used for the band. At a special meeting on June 18, 1894, a bill from the White House (Monterey) for \$230 "for new suits" was ordered paid. On January 7, 1895, the members voted that Mr. W. E. Parker's uniform be paid for from the treasury.

In the 1880's, before the department was officially organized, the hose company had a two-story building on Alvarado street, with only a hose cart on the lower floor and a meeting room upstairs. Herb Blspo, a former member of the Monterey Fire Department, showed us a picture of that building and also allowed us to read the minute book of 10 years ago. Bispo left the department in 1955 after 43 years of service; he was the oldest city employee in length of service at that time.

In 1885 when the Hook and Ladder Company was organized, they had no hook and no ladder, only a wagon. The hose cart had two wheels and the hose was of woven material. The great ambition of the company was to beat the Pacific Grove Company, and they always did, according to Otis Mantor, a member who joined the company in 1885.

The races were held on Alvarado street, starting at the head of the street, and running down toward the lower end, past Lambert's lumber yard and ending near the Custom House. There were six men to the side of the cart.

Mr. Mantor did not remember ever putting out a fire.