

Raleigh Fire Department Steamers

Research notes compiled by Mike Legeros
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- 1870 - Rescue Steam Fire Engine Company incorporated on February 24, 1870. Raleigh's first steam-powered fire engine was delivered on April 5, 1870. Built by the Gould Company of Newark, NJ, the second-class (or second-size) steamer had a capacity of 600 gallons per-minute (GPM) and could shoot a vertical stream of water 126 feet. As the volunteer fire company did not own any horses, the steamer was hand-pulled for the first nine years. The city also provided a hand-drawn hose carriage for the fire company's use.
- 1885 - Gould steamer was transported by railroad flatcar to fight a hotel fire in Fayetteville on November 5, 1885.
- 1887 - City water system was completed with 120 fire hydrants. Hose carts become primary firefighting apparatus as firefighters can connect hoses directly to hydrants and without the need of pumping engines.
- 1888 - Sanborn fire insurance map listed department apparatus as including one hand engine, one steam engine, two chemical engines, two hook and ladder trucks, and four hose carts.
- 1891 - Report for fiscal year ending February 28, 1891, listed Gould steamer in reserve.
- 1897 - Gould steamer transported by railroad flatcar to fight a fire in downtown Durham on October 14, 1897. Along with hose, a hose wagon, and about twenty-five firemen, the special Southern Railway train reached Durham in just 35 minutes. Upon arrival, the nearly \$250,000 blaze has just been brought under control.
- 1903 - Sanborn fire insurance map dated July 1903 listed Gould steamer in reserve.
- 1903 - Fire Commission submitted report to City Commissioners on September 4, 1903, that the "steamer is worthless and cannot be used until repaired. It will be necessary to put in a new boiler and probably make some slight changes in the running works. The cost will approximately \$700. In case of accident to water system, the city will be without fire protection without a steamer. We therefore recommend that the city have the steamer repaired."
- 1904 - Finance Commission recommended to City Commissioners that fire department be authorized to repair steam fire engine.
- 1905 - Report for fiscal year ending February 28, 1905, listed Gould steamer as "out of repair."



WEDNESDAY MORNING, JULY 12, 1905.

FIREMEN'S PRIDE

New Engine and the Eastman Nozzle.

Solid Stream, Unbroken, Shot 170 Feet Skyward, and a Horizontal Nozzle Sent the Water 370 Feet Away. Men Knocked Down.

The demonstration made by the Raleigh Fire Department yesterday afternoon while testing the new American La France fire engine and the Eastman nozzle, was witnessed by hundreds of people, and inspired them with pride and enthusiasm. It gave Mr. Walter Woolcott, ex-Chief of the Fire Department infinite pleasure, as he was the main cause of the two machines being purchased, and Chief Mangum was perfectly delighted. All the members of the department were charmed.

The demonstration was a complete success. Never in Raleigh, and the experts said that never in North Carolina, has any city Fire Department exhibited at the same time better equipment and superior ability of its men. The report of the committee on the part of the city is satisfactory so far as rendered. The test was made at the corner of Fayetteville and Davie streets.

But to the machines. The Eastman nozzle, with the required pressure was guaranteed to throw water perpendicularly one hundred and twenty-five feet, but exceeding almost its supposed possibilities the power of the engine cast the water even against the wind one hundred and seventy feet straight upward, the stream not breaking until it reached the very top of its ascent, when it seemed to segment into drops and mist, and caused a gentle rain hundreds of yards away, at times. The solid stream would have gone far above and even almost over any building in the city. When the nozzle was made to incline the stream was shot 370 feet away, and went almost this distance in the face of the breeze. At one time two nozzles were operated, and the water went the same distance, as far as the single stream.

- 1905 - Finance Committee of Board of Alderman purchased [authorized purchase of?] a new American steam engine on April 10, 1905.¹ The price paid was \$4,600, of which \$1,600 was cash. The remainder would be paid in nine months.
- 1905 - Following its delivery, Raleigh's second steam-powered fire engine was demonstrated during an acceptance test at the corner of Fayetteville and Davie Streets on July 12, 1905. The third-size (or third-class) American LaFrance Metropolitan steamer had a Fox boiler on a crane frame and a capacity of 600 GPM. The nameplate on the apparatus (in present day) read "Built by American LaFrance Fire Engine Co., Seneca Falls, NY, No. 3061." The remaining payment was authorized on September 9, 1905.
- 1906 - Rescue Steam Fire Engine Company No. 2 organized by June 1, 1906. Charter members are William Brewer, Edward Ennis, R. T. Gowan, E. T. Hall, Jr., T. B. Heartt, and S. L. Johnson.
- 1906 - Rescue Steam Fire Engine Company No. 2 received approval to change name to L. A. Mahler Steamer Company on June 29, 1906.
- 1908 - American LaFrance steamer transported by railroad flatcar to fight a fire at the largest building in Cary on February 25, 1908.
- 1908 - Gould steamer was still owned by city on June 13, 1908, but could not be used.
- 1912 - Career fire department placed in service on December 23, 1912. The American LaFrance steamer was stored at Station 1 on West Morgan Street.
- 1913 - American LaFrance steamer used at *News & Observer* building on West Martin Street on April 24, 1913. After a water main broke, Fire Chief Sherwood Brockwell directed the steamer to the intersection of Fayetteville and Davie streets to draw water from one of the old underground cisterns.
- 1915 - The last horse was retired from duty. By this time, the remaining horse-drawn apparatus, including the American LaFrance steamer, were motor-pulled with a trailer hitch.
- 1918 - Annual report noted the steamer answers only in Fire District and on "emergency calls."
- 1931 - National Board of Fire Underwriters report listed the steamer in reserve.
- 19?? - Steamer procured by State College professor Charles B. Park and placed at engineering school.
- 1942 - Steamer appeared in the Raleigh Sesquicentennial Parade, drawn by horses.
- 1947 - The steamer served as auxiliary fire pump at either the State Fairgrounds or nearby Gregory Poole Equipment company. Scheduled for disposal, the steamer was returned to the Raleigh Fire Department through the intervention of teenage fire buff Bob Biggs. He petitioned the city for permission to return the apparatus to the fire department, but they specified that it must be returned in the same manner as it arrived, drawn by horses. Biggs brought the steamer back to Raleigh using a pair of horses from either State College or Meredith College.

Firemen Knocked Down.

Once, before the office of *The News and Observer*, the hose, at the very connection with the nozzle, broke, and the water was turned on the crowd, and five men were knocked down almost simultaneously. Mr. Will Jones, an employee at the Cooper Marble Works, was rolled on the pavement, and bruised from head to feet, blood coming from his face and hands. Others were hurt, but none seriously. The unmanned end of the hose, until the water was cut off, whizzed around like a monster of the deep, on land, throwing out a current of water strong enough to knock a man senseless. Street gamins were constantly getting drenched, and frequently ladies were soured in the shower and a few darkies took such shower baths as luxurious things. People on a passing street car were wet by the spray from the stream, and by the stream itself.

And later:

The hose was afterwards taken up Fayetteville street and a stream turned loose. The result showed plenty of force behind the water. People were wet from the heavy spray and a young lady, in front of the postoffice was completely drenched.

In the meantime:

The engine worked perfectly, and the observers, crowding round, unconscious of the fact, had holes burnt through their clothes and hats and umbrellas. Occasionally some one would holler: an extra large spark had gone to his scalp or skin.

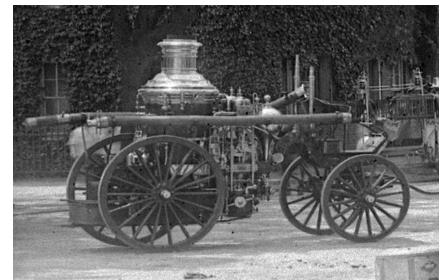
The Committee Was Pleased.

The committee of experts worked until a late hour last night calculating the results of the various tests, but did not complete its work. Its report will show that the engine made a head of steam from cold water in 6 minutes and 30 seconds, the gauge showing 45 pounds pressure. It says the engine will do much better than this as the wood used in starting up the fire proved defective. The engine worked smoothly in all its parts, and gave general satisfaction.

The guarantee to throw 600 gallons of water per minute was fully met. The tests were made through Siamese couplings and nozzles of different dimensions, the readings being taken at the nozzle and at the engine. There were seven of these tests showing that the engine met all the requirements in the purchase contract.

In connection with the statement made by the committee as indicated above, it explained that the report in detail is withheld until all the data can be calculated and put in form and submitted to the fire committee of the board of aldermen of Raleigh.

The engine was operated here by an expert from the manufacturing firm, Mr. C. Wussell. The committee from Raleigh, before whom the test was made, consisted of Prof. John Parks, Messrs. W. W. Robbins, W. C. Crum and J. H. Hellig.



¹ In 1903, the American Fire Engine Company and the LaFrance Fire Engine Company merged to form the American-LaFrance Fire Engine Company.

1955 - Bob Biggs left Raleigh after graduation from State College and joined the air force. He was active with the fire department until that time, including serving as a charter member of the Raleigh Emergency Rescue Squad, Inc. During his decades away from Raleigh, the steamer appeared at fire department special events, including as a static display. During that time, the steamer was repainted with red hydrant paint, covering the gold-leaf lettering on the frame.



1978 - The steamer was pulled by mules for the Raleigh Christmas Parade. Because of an ordinance at the time prohibiting horses on city streets, the City Manager allowed a pair of mules provided by Carl Davis, father of firefighter Jan Parker. Dry ice in the chimney simulated smoke. Shortly afterward, the steamer was permanently mounted on a special trailer.



2012 - The steamer was restored to operating condition for the centennial anniversary of the Raleigh Fire Department, by a group of fire department members and steam engine enthusiasts. They were led by Capt. Michael Ezzell, Asst. Chief Bert Richards, and Lt. Patrick Murphy.

On June 8, 2012, the steamer was fired for the first time in decades [correct? Or just the state certification?], behind Station 28. It also flowed water, drawn from a portable drop tank.

On June 11, 2012, the steamer was removed from the trailer for the first time since the late 1970s. The trailer was modified with ramps and a winch and has continued to serve as transportation for the steamer.



On June 16, 2012, the steamer made its first public appearance since its operational restoration, at a series of special events for the fire department's centennial anniversary.

On August 11, 2012, the steamer was fired alongside Charlotte's steamer at SAFRE in Raleigh.

On September 28, 2013, the steamer appeared in a parade in Warrenton, NC.

On July 26, 2014, the steamer was fired at SAFRE in Raleigh.

On June 16, 2018, the steamer was fired at Fire-Rescue 2018 in Columbia, SC.



On August 11, 2018, the steamer was fired at SAFRE in Raleigh.

On August 24, 2019, the steamer was fired at SAFRE in Raleigh.

On August 13, 2022, the steamer was fired at SAFRE in Raleigh.