

The following is taken from *Where The Ferns Grew Tall*, a book written by the Class of 1977 of Ferndale High School.

Fire Department

Prior to 1885, Ferndale had neither a city fire-fighting organization nor equipment. The disastrous fire of 1875, which nearly destroyed the south Main Street business section, was battled by volunteer bucket brigades. In 1882, after a less-serious but frightening fire experience, the city fathers purchased a second-hand Hunneman hand-pumper engine from the City of San Jose, an engine considered to be one of the best in California. Ferndale's first fire company was organized the next year for the purpose of operating the Hunneman engine. Operation required two engineers, two pipe men, five engine couplers, two brakemen, four pole men, and three suction hosemen. In 1924 this hand pumper was sold to a Hollywood film company.

Ferndale's Fire Department was permanently organized in February, 1897. Forty-five members were present to begin work on a constitution and by-laws, and to select officers. The first chief was R. D. Dunn.

Business meetings were originally held on Saturdays, but in 1890, the meeting time was changed to the first Thursday evening of each month, and this schedule has been maintained to the present date. In 1937, it was decided that the third Thursday of each month should be set aside for a general department drill.

In the fire department constitution, eligibility requirements for membership were set as follows: "No certificate of membership in the department shall be issued to other than a male person over the age of 18 years and a resident or employee of the City of Ferndale."

Department finances were based on donations. Citizens often donated \$10-25 for fire calls answered at their homes. Businessmen donated \$1 per month to the organization. This money was used for officer salaries, minor purchases, and social activities. In 1911, the Town Board agreed to allot \$50 per month for general use. It also continued to provide necessary equipment and facilities as need arose.

In the first year or two of its existence the Fire Department purchased other equipment: slicker coats, axes, nozzles, hose, and ladders. The necessity of a wagon to haul their ladders, weighing up to 300 pounds each, soon became apparent.

The first ladder truck was built in 1898, and housed at Nevens Stables. A hook and ladder company was then formed to man the engine. In 1939, when this truck was no longer serviceable, the company was disbanded and the wagon was retired. It is presently on display at the Humboldt County Fairgrounds.

Hose carts were also built for the new department. Three hose carts were secured and paid for by the town board. Three hose companies were formed to man the new equipment. Two of these carts are presently on display at the Fire Museum.



The Ferndale Volunteer Fire Department is active in many community events. Here, Clint Haywood drives Santa Claus into town in a fire truck, 1946.

In 1905, a Waterous Gasoline Engine, a hand-driven pumper, was added to the department. It was hauled by boat from San Rafael to Eureka, and then to Ferndale on Bill Crowley's wagon. This engine served the community for 30 years, and is also on display at the fairgrounds.

The department's first motorized truck, a Model T, with chemical tanks, was purchased in 1917. A new company, Chemical No.1, was formed to man the engine. In 1939, the engine was sold to Tony Gosselin of Eureka and the company disbanded.

Around 1920, a fourth engine was purchased by the city, an American La France with a gasoline-driven pumper. It was used until 1952, and then retired to display. The city replaced it with a Van Pelt on an International chassis. It continues to serve with Company No. 1 in the department.

In 1923, a Dodge chemical truck was purchased by the city. This engine used soda acid to extinguish fires. A new chemical company, Chemical No.2, was formed to operate the engine, which was retired in 1937, and replaced by an American La France pumper. The

present whereabouts of the chemical truck is unknown. The new La France pumper had a 330-gallon tank capacity and was used by Company No. 2 until it was sold to the Redway Fire District in 1955. The present American La France pumper was then purchased.

In 1948, the men of the department built a new hook and ladder truck and reformed the Hook and Ladder Company. The Ferndale Fire District and the city shared the expense of a Van Pelt on an International chassis. The truck was sold to College of the Redwoods in 1969. The district then purchased another truck of the same type, which presently serves Hook and Ladder Company No.3.

When the community was considering the purchase of a truck in 1883, the importance of a public water system was also discussed. Francis Francis had previously built tanks, and in 1876, built a reservoir and laid pipe to town. At the 1883 meeting, plans were made to use Francis Creek to supply more water, with two or three dams closed by gates. Dams were put in place by the city each spring—remaining until fall—to make pumping reservoirs. These were still being used in 1960.

Plans were also made in 1883, for cisterns (holding tanks). According to Norm Clough, two cisterns were in use by 1900. One—with a 9,000-gallon capacity—was at the White Front Store (present Bank of America) intersection. The second—with a 12,000-gallon capacity—was located at the Ivanhoe Hotel intersection. These were used until 1960, when they were filled in due to weakness and the construction of a new state road.

Hydrants were also supplied by Mr. Francis. The city rented them from him in 1897. Certain firemen, known as hydrant-men, were assigned to operate them. In 1933, the hydrants and all related equipment were ordered by the Fire Underwriters to be changed to National Hose Thread.

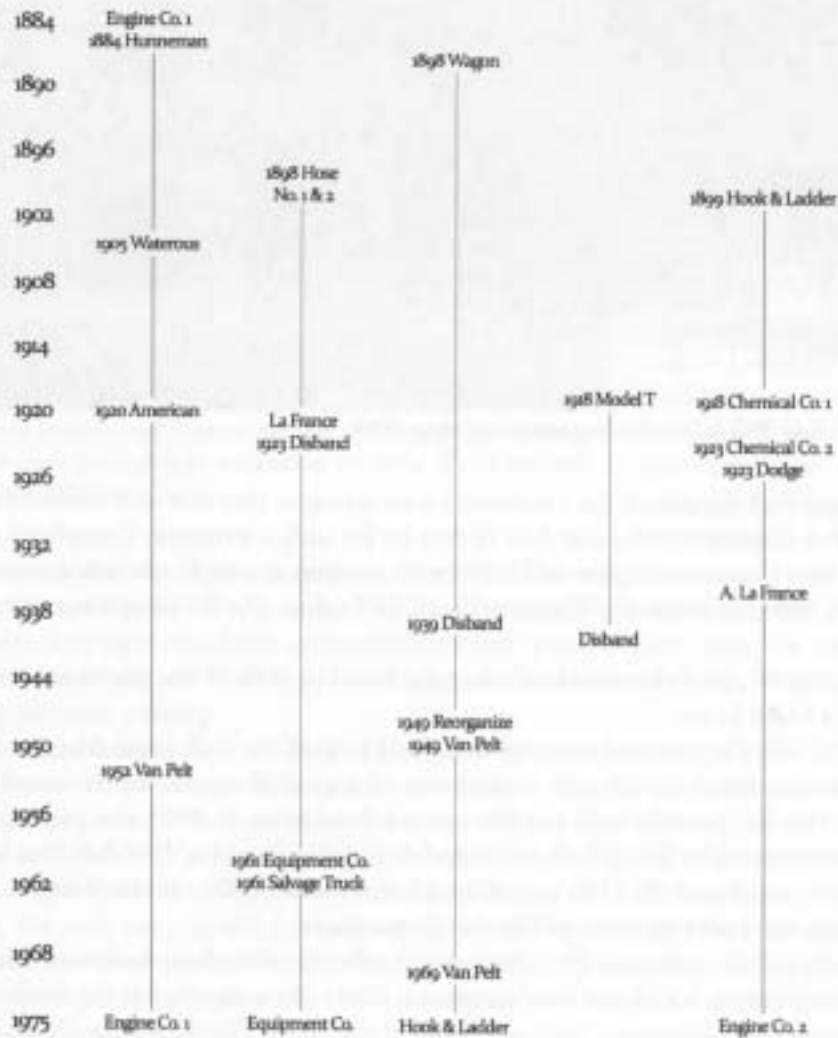
The Fire Department recognized the need for a fire alarm in 1902. In June, they met with the town council and made such a request. A brass bell was ordered from San Francisco and installed in a cupola above the White Front Store. A signal code was established and printed for use by the firemen. During the 1906 earthquake, the bell and cupola tumbled to the ground. The bell was then hung on a pole in front of the firehouse. Norm Clough recalls the bell still in place at the end of World War II, when local children rang the bell in celebration. In later years Mr. Clough made a replica of the original cupola, hung the brass bell in it, and placed it above the Fire Museum.

The first electric siren was purchased in 1931, following a period of about 25 years when the alarm system consisted of a steam whistle installed at the Central Creamery plant. The new electric siren was placed above the firehouse and was wired to blow from the telephone office. At Joe Bognuda's suggestion, it was decided to blow one continuous blast each day at noon. Fluctuating blasts were to indicate a fire warning.

Fire equipment was housed in local sheds and stables in the early days of the department. In 1899, the department and city began plans to build their own engine house.

ORGANIZATION OF THE FERDALE FIRE COMPANIES

(1884-1975)





The fire station on Brown Street, looking southwest, about 1915.

Boynton and Hall purchased the Giselman lot in March of that year and offered the Ferndale Fire Department the east half of that lot for such a structure. Completed in 1901, it housed the Hunneman engine and hose carts. Another engine house was secured in September, 1908, to house the Waterous Gasoline Engine. The building was owned by a Mrs. Herri.

When the Model T chemical truck was purchased in 1918, it was put in an enclosed shed at 554 Main Street.

In 1900, Fire Department meetings were held in the City Hall, located beside Larry Martin's current home. In the near vicinity was a house of ill-repute, which caused many problems. This hall later burned, possibly as a result of arson. In 1915, the present Fire Hall was constructed to house both the Ferndale City Hall and the Ferndale Fire Department and its equipment. The city moved its administration offices to the Village Club in 1967, leaving the entire building to the Fire Department.

Not only did the volunteer Fire Department offer Ferndale fire protection, but it also took an active part in social and civic functions. It was often responsible for the local Independence Day celebration, held at the site of the Ninth District Fair in Ferndale. Other celebrations were sponsored by the department in conjunction with the fair, Christmas, and the New Year. The Christmas celebration was discontinued in 1931, when the firemen voted to use the money to pay for a new siren. The department continued to be



The country's tallest living Christmas tree was first lit in 1934, and has been lit every year since, with the exception of the World War II blackout years, and the 1973 energy crisis.

responsible for the Fair Ball until 1942.

The Fire Department secured uniforms in 1899, for their public appearances. In 1900, May 1 was set as the day for a firemen's celebration. Appearing in full uniform—lettered caps, belts, red neckties, and trimmed suits—the men held a parade and drill, followed by a ball in the evening. As other companies joined Engine Company No.1, the men began to compete in both ability and dress on this festive day.

In 1904, a baseball game was initiated. A rotating

cup was awarded to the winning company after 1910. Hose races continued, with the incentive being a box of 100 cigars. In 1912, the first water fights were reported. Rules were drawn, with four men on a team competing for a cash prize. In later years, the competitive events have been held on Washington's birthday, the banquet and dance being held the following Saturday evening

Following the formation of a baseball league within the department in 1912, the establishment of a permanent playing field was desired. The firemen began raising funds for a park and dance pavilion to be located at the south end of Main and Berding Streets. Expenses included \$2,000 for labor, \$3,000 for lumber, \$5,000 for other expenses, and \$238 for a cement bridge. The pavilion was completed in 1922, and on September 22 of that year, the park was officially opened with a Grand Ball. Two months later, the department decided to deed the land to the city, the deed to be held in trust. Recorded in department minutes on February 4, 1926, it was voted to transfer the property to the city retaining a 50-year lease.

In April, 1940, the department voted to install lights in the park to allow night baseball games. It was decided to have 65-foot poles with two lights on each.

Located south of the park and 50 feet up the hillside is Ferndale's living Christmas

tree. The original idea for a community Christmas tree belonged to Dave Cohen and John Lund, who presented it at a Fire Department meeting in 1931. A towering Sitka Spruce, standing 110 feet high, measuring four and a half feet in diameter at the base, and 50 feet tip-to-tip at the lower limbs, was selected. The tree was officially lighted in 1934. It was illuminated by more than 500 lights, a top star six feet wide, and a cross twelve feet high at the base of the tree. The men responsible for that first lighting were Walter Bartlett, A. M. Ring, Viggo Eriksen, V. O. Givins, Dr. L. R. Codoni, Joe Bognuda, Everett Hull, and F. M. Clover. The fire department has lighted the tree every year since 1934, with the exception of the blackout years of World War II, and during the energy crisis of 1973.⁽²¹⁾

The Ferndale Fire Department is now in its seventy-ninth year. At present, it consists of 70 active members, equipped with five modern trucks: three pumpers, one water tanker, and one rescue wagon. Its volunteer firemen continue to offer Ferndale citizens fire protection of the highest quality, while also taking an active part in both civic and social functions. The residents of this city—and of the surrounding area—rest easier knowing they have a fire-protection force of which any city would be proud.

FERNDALE FIRE DEPARTMENT CHIEFS

W.B. Barney	1889-1898
Fred Cruickshank	1900-1901
G.L. Collins	1902-1903
Fred Cruickshank	1904-1906
W.A. Bartlett	1907
E.C. Mills	1908-1912
George Haywood	1913
Charles Grinsell	1914-1917
W.A. Bartlett	1918-1923
Fred Mills	Feb.-July 1924
W.A. Bartlett	July-Dec. 1924-1927
R. Christensen	1928
Al Dusek	1929
C.J. Olsen	1930-1931
Viggo Eriksen	1932-1938
George Becker	Oct. 1938-1947
Norm Clough	1948-1964
Don Smith	1965-1967
Lino Moggi	1968-1975