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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: DON P. JOHNSON, TOWN MANAGER
FROM: ROBERT C. CRAIG, FIRE CHIEF
SUBJECT: CPA FUNDING – ANTIQUE FIRE APPARATUS
DATE: 10/15/2004
CC: ATTACHMENT

Don:

As you are aware, many members of this department are seeking to restore and place back in service, one of our antique fire engines and to perform any necessary repairs on the other engine. Already these individuals have spent much of their own time and efforts on this project and the local firefighters union has donated funds towards the project. However, more funds will be necessary to continue and complete the project. I am told that more donations may be forthcoming. However, as we previously spoke, I would seek the support and the approval of yourself and the Board of Selectmen to submit this project for consideration under CPA funding. It is estimated that an additional 20-25,000 dollars may be necessary to complete restoration and repair work on our antique apparatus which is of significant historical value. To further highlight this historical significance I have attached a narrative detailing the history of these antique engines. This narrative was written in great detail by FF/EMT Klauer.

Please contact me if you have any further questions regarding this request. Thank you for your consideration and assistance in this matter.

Respectfully submitted,



Robert C. Craig

Fire Chief

A Brief History of Engines 2, 3 and 4

In 1924, three Reo chassis were purchased and fitted with chemical extinguishers, ladders, hose and tools that were considered applicable to the control and extinguishment of fires. While this was a big step from the hand drawn apparatus that the Town began purchasing in 1893, and the subsequent conversion of Gertrude Daniel's automobile, the chemical tanks were limited and only the West Acton engine had a small front mounted pump.

In some of the darkest days of the Depression, Chief MacGregor and the Board of Engineers were faced with apparatus that was practically obsolete before it was purchased. The 1924 Reo's were limited as they carried two 40 gallon soda acid extinguishers. While these were state of the art for small incipient fires, anyone who was on the end of a line could not really control the nozzle because of the chemical reaction; therefore, it was 40 or 80 gallons. If you needed a lesser amount, an open window was the logical area to spend the excess. If more water was necessary, the line was extended from the hydrant if in the water district or if out of the district, stand by and offer condolences to the property owners. Such was likely the response when McDonald's Slaughter House burned on the Concord – Acton line. In addition, the Engine in South Acton had loose spokes in the wheels, which meant that the spokes were hydrated with wet towels between responses.

In 1934 the citizens voted to replace the Acton Center engine with a new pumper and the Farrar Company in Woodville built an engine with a front mounted 500 gallon per minute pump and a small rotary gear pump for the booster line. This engine would remain as the first line of defense in Acton Center for the next 21 years.

Two years later, Chief Hanson S. MacGregor and the Board of Engineers realized that more up to date equipment was mandated if the department was going to be able to save property and reduce the insurance rates. On March 9th, 1936, the voters considered the following under Article 22. To see if the town will vote to purchase two new fire trucks for Precincts 2 and 4 or act anything thereon.

Voted: Unanimously that there be appropriated the sum of eight thousand dollars (8,000) for the purchase of two fire trucks for use in Precinct 2 and 3 and to meet the said appropriation there be raised in the tax levy of 1936 the sum of two thousand dollars and that the treasurer with the approval of the selectmen be authorized to borrow the sum of six thousand (6,000), and to issue notes therefore payable in accordance with Chapter 44, General Laws; so that the whole loan shall be paid in not more than four years; that the purchase of said trucks be left to the board of Selectmen and the Fire Engineers of the town, also that the Selectmen be authorized to dispose of any unnecessary equipment.

The Town purchased two engines from the Seagrave Corporation and to finance the purchase took out four \$1,500 notes from Marchants National Bank to be repaid in the next four years. Both vehicles were driven from Columbus, Ohio to Acton and placed in

service July 15th, 1936. The two vehicles were consecutively numbered, Engine 3 is 83,500 and engine 4 is 83,501. Both vehicles were originally identical as they left the factory. Chief MacGregor made the following comment about their purchase.

“I would like to say at this time that these two pieces of apparatus have proven to be way beyond our expectations and I feel satisfied that the town’s money was well spent.”

Little did Chief MacGregor realize but these engines would remain in service longer and see more fires than any successive apparatus the town ever purchased. Beginning about the time the engines arrived, a series of barn fires occurred in South Acton. The first fire occurred in late July at 15 School Street and involved a barn that was attached to a store with apartments above it, other barns included the Campbell’s at 5 High Street, the Ice House on Martin Street, the Hayward barn at Stow and Martin Street, Hanson’s barn at 263 School Street, a barn at Granbergs at the corner of Parker Street, Greenough’s barn behind Exchange Hall, and Merriams’ barn at 36 School Street. In addition, there was Johnson’s Piano stool building and the Barker’s Cider Mill, the South Acton Woolen Mill, Merriam’s Mill, the Boy Scout house, a few structures from the American Powder Company along with several very extensive brush fires, one at the quarry which lasted about a week and a summer of brush fires while Route 2 was being built. Although West Acton and Acton Center which included East and North Acton had their share of fires, they did not have the benefit of an incendiary whose specialty was large abandoned buildings. While these were probably the exception, mixed with chimney and house fires, Engine 3 was first due at any incident in South Acton for at least 26 years. Its successor was Engine 6, a 1961 Farrar, pumper with a 1,000 gallon per minute pump. When Engine 6 arrived, it was housed in West Acton as the new South Acton Station was under construction and the new engine would not fit in the old station; therefore Engine 3 continued to respond first. While Engine 4 had a similar history, West Acton did not have the industrial potential that South Acton did and Engine 4 responded to Boxborough for many of its major fires. The successor to Engine 4 was named Engine 1, a 1957 Farrar with a 750 gallon pump. This placed Engine 4 as a reserve piece when it was 21 years of age and Engine 3 was 27 years of age at the time the station was completed and Engine 6 placed in South Acton.

While the community changed drastically after the Second World War in both population and expectations of the fire department, the engines continued to remain in service until 1973 when they were removed from service by Chief Barry. While Chief Barry was interested in their disposal, there was a great amount of sentiment amongst the members of the department, most of whom had grown up with these sentinels of simpler times and also had known these engines as tools that had stood the test of time and endurance. Chief Barry reconsidered and the engines remained with the Fire Department.

Oddly enough, Engines 3 and 4 were loaded with 4” hose and relegated as hose wagons for a time. One night, Engine 3 and Engine 6 went to Maynard on a drill and Engine 6 was drafting from the Maynard Mill pond and supplying the Maynard’s ladder pipe with water through Engine 3’s four inch hose when something went wrong and the inner strainer got sucked into Engine 6’s pump putting them out of service. Engine 3 was then utilized and the drill continued with a little less water flowing through the ladder pipe.

On another occasion, Chief Barry was advised that for some reason, the water tower became dangerously low with about 12' of water remaining for the use of the town. Arrangements were made with the Town of Concord and Engine 3 began pumping water from a hydrant at the corner of Great Road and Pope Road into an Acton hydrant nearby and pumped continuously throughout the night into the next morning. With the added pressure of the Concord hydrant, the engine pumped close to a half million gallons of water that night. About 3' o'clock that morning, I filled the gasoline tank with from four cans of gasoline that had been left and checked the oil, otherwise, the engine ran the entire duration of about 12 hours without incident.

Both engines were equipped with Reo Gold Crown power engines of six cylinders, 3 1/8" bore and 5" stroke yielding a displacement of 230 cubic inches and a braking horsepower of 70. Each contained a Firemaster pump of 500 gallon per minute capacity and especially made as part of the transmission. The pumps are single stage and constructed of solid bronze mounted on a stainless steel shaft.

The two vehicles appear identical and likely remained that way during most of their duration. At some time, likely about 1962, some changes were made to make them more serviceable for the duration. When they left the factory, they were equipped with booster tanks of 100 gallons, the tanks were replaced with 500 gallon tanks which decreased the space available for hose. Each engine originally 1,400 feet of 2 1/2" hose, and the booster reel had about the bed was subsequently split to carry a half load of 3 inch hose. Engine 4 was converted to sealed beam headlights; however, Engine 3 has the 32 candlepower bulbs. Each engine had a Mars light, these were replaced when the tanks were upgraded. Additional changes included the placement of diamond plate over the wooden running boards and floor of the cab and Engine 4 received new upholstery and 100 amp alternators replaced the generators. Both engines have been repainted and were a darker almost maroon red initially. During their later years, they were used for brush fires as they were small, lighter weight and during the season were loaded with forestry hose and pump cans. While Engines 1, 6 and 7 were newer, they were not off road vehicles and each was much heavier, wider, and taller which limited their ability to be brought into tight areas. Engine 3 was able to cross the bridge at Merriam's mill where Engine 6 was too heavy to cross. Each engine carried one 30 foot extension ladder and one 16 foot roof ladder. The mileage on Engine 4 in 1956 was 7,625 miles, a portion of which was incurred in its maiden run between Columbus and Acton.

While Engine 4 replaced a 1924 Reo with a front end pump, the 1924 remained in service as a back up until replaced by Rescue 6 in 1948. It was sold to Arthur D. Raymond of 180 Nagog Hill Road who had a summer place at Blodgett's Landing on Lake Sunapee where it was used for many years. I learned about it when I went to Raymond's camp and found that it had previously been used in Acton. It is still in existence and owned by a collector in Bristol, Rhode Island. The predecessor to Engine 3, another 1924 Reo was on display in Boston at the Boston Fire Department museum and was lost in a fire. The Acton Center engines were at first a 1924 Reo that was identical with Engines 1 and the one lost in the fire. That vehicle was displaced in 1934 when the second Engine 2 was purchased from Farrar. The second Engine 2 is now in the town of Monson,

Massachusetts and is used as a parade piece. This information will show that Engine 1, 2, 3 and 4 all exist. Engines 2, 3 and 4 are from the second major purchase of apparatus and Engine 1 is the only piece that exists from the 1924 series. I have not been able to learn the fate of the first Engine 2 but it is likely that it was relegated to the Moth Department and equipped with a sprayer. I am aware that the first brush truck was a 1930 Model A with pump and tank and that vehicle was used by the Moth Department after Engine 5 was purchased in 1946. A comparison of costs between the three engines suggests that there may have been something less than the ideal since Engine 2 was purchased from Reo Sales Corporation for \$1,307.00 (chassis), Farrar Body Company was paid \$828 for the body and American Steam Pump was paid \$800 for the pump or pumps. This totaled \$2,935 with an unexpended balance of \$65 and each of the 1936 Reos cost \$4000.

Since Chief Barry became aware of the sentiment of the engines, they remained within the department and have been used as parade pieces at events, served at both weddings and funerals. While they are still registered as Fire Apparatus, the two engines may be the only two identical, consecutively numbered Engines in existence anywhere of this vintage.