

Juvenile Hose Co. No. 3 by Gary Dielman

In December 1999, Baker City bought a used ladder truck for \$30,000 from the city of Springfield, Oregon. That purchase caused me to think about the fire-fighting apparatus in Baker City around 1890, several decades before Baker City got its first gasoline-powered fire truck.

By 1890 the city had advanced from the bucket brigade to a water distribution system of water mains and hydrants, much as we have today. Also, as is the case today, a hose was attached to hydrants and water sprayed out through nozzles attached to the other end. The big difference between then and now was the method of getting the hoses and nozzles to the fire hydrants. That's where the hose carts and hose teams, called companies, came into the picture.



Hose Cart Race in Baker City, ca. 1890

The hose cart was not what one might think of as a cart. Rather it was a couple of six-foot-tall, spoke wheels connected by a four-foot-long axle. On the axle was a spool around which the hose was wrapped. From the front of the hose cart extended a short tongue with a bar horizontal to the ground at its end. With a man at each end of the bar, the hose cart could be towed and maneuvered.

But to get the hose cart to the fire fast, more manpower was needed. For that purpose, two leather straps were extended out parallel to each other from the bar at the end of the tongue about fifteen feet in front of the hose cart. Besides the two men on each end

of the steering bar, six men (three on each side) had a hold of the loops attached to the leather strap spaced far enough apart from each other so as to be able to run without clipping the heels of the man in front. With some arrangements the two lead men wore shoulder harnesses attached to the end of the two straps. A ninth man, the foreman, ran along side the team directing the operation.

Baker City had several adult, as well as juvenile, hose cart companies, whose hose carts were situated at strategic positions throughout the town. We are fortunate to have a record of the inner workings of one of the juvenile hose cart companies. In the archives of the Baker County Library there is a hand-written volume titled *Records of Juvenile Hose Co. No. 3*. It contains the minutes of the hose company's meetings and membership rosters from 1890 to 1898. (Original spellings retained.)



Champion Hose Cart Team ready for parade July 4, 1900.
Team "Mascot" is Miss Norma Hyde.

Without fanfare the volume begins with this entry: "March 25, 1890. The boys hose Co. No. 3 meet at the band hall at 7 o'clock. To organize a hose Co. On motion that the officers be elected. On motion that Mr. Lev. Small be elected for foreman. On motion C. Bowen be elected 1st [asst.] foreman. On motion R. S. Richardson be elected sect. On motion Robert Henry be elected treasurer. On motion we adjourn until next Monday night March 31. Motion carried."

At the March 21, 1890, meeting the members set the initiation fee at \$1.50 and the meeting dues at \$.25. Also at this meeting Foreman Small carried out his most important responsibility by making a number of position assignments. The most coveted assignment of nozzleman, who directed the stream of water onto the fire, went to Robert Henry, Albert Ferguson, A.S. James, and Charles Nebergall. Small named as hydrantmen R.S. Richardson, Jesse Ernest, Harvey McCord, and G.W. Rankin.

Positions of linesmen and spansmen went to William Levens, Robert Haines, Pink Hyde, and Cliff Bowen. Cart caretakers were E. Lachs, Ernst Goodwin, and Henry Nagle.

Although a hose cart team consisted of eight men and a foreman, a hose company needed more members than that, so that when there was a fire enough men were on hand to make up a complete team. Therefore, one of the initial items of business was proposing and voting on admission of new members. At the April 7th and 10th meetings, Mark Boyd and William Moore were voted in by unanimous votes. Robert Newhouse, who received seven favorable votes and two black balls, was also approved. But the proposed membership of Willie Hughes, who received four black balls, was rejected.

In order to maintain discipline in the ranks, the members set fines for the following infractions: \$1.00 for not appearing in full uniform for a parade, \$1.00 for leaving a fire without the foreman's permission; \$.25 for using vulgar language or smoking in a parade, and \$.25 for nonattendance at meetings. [\$1.00 = \$25.00 today.]

After several organizational meetings in March and April of 1890, Juvenile Hose Co. No. 3 did not meet again until August 18, 1890, at which time the members dealt with discipline problems. The charges and action taken were described this way in the minutes: "Meeting called to order by Foreman. The first business was the charges brought up against A. Ferguson for bad conduct at drill. The charges were swearing [and] disobeying orders [by] leaving meeting without permission of Foreman. The fines amounted to \$1.25. On account of Mr. Ferguson refusing to pay the fines he was expelled from H. Co. No.3. C. Nebergall also refused to pay his dues and was expelled."

The record of Juvenile Hose Company No. 3 contains very little information about the company responding to fires. But in August 1891 there are entries showing the company responded to two alarms. The entry dated August 26 states simply, "Alarm 10 o'clock p.m." followed by a list of members involved: Henry, Ison, Bower, Hyde, McCord, Corey, Rankin, Nagle, Ellis, Small, and Ernst. A similar entry for August 29 reports, "Alarm turned in a 4 o'clock p.m. Gardners' Store," with a list of those responding: Ison, McCord, Curry, Small, Nagle, Rankin, Richardson, and Ernst.

The record contains just one other fire response entry, an 1892 list of alarms: January 30, October 12 and December 26. A matrix lists 22 members and which of the alarms each responded to. The average member responded to two alarms. Only two members, Bowen and Ernst, responded to all four.

A couple of entries six months apart indicate that the company's hose cart was in need of replacement. Apparently it was the responsibility of the city to furnish hose carts, so in June 1893 a committee was appointed to ask the city for a new one. Then in January 1893 the following entry indicated the company was getting impatient with the city's failure to attend to the company's request. "Motion was made that a committee of three be appointed to draw up a petition signed by the members of the company for a new cart. And present the same to the City Council; carried."

The entry for March 5, 1896, is noteworthy. A proposal was put to the members to consolidate with McCord Hose Co. No. 2. After discussion "it was decided by J.H. Co. No. 3 to keep our own cart for a while longer." Nevertheless, the two hose companies combined their talent in competitions, as seen in a photo in the Baker County Library collection showing that a team made up of members of both companies won \$95 at a competition held on July 4, 1900.

The March 19, 1896, entry indicates relations between the two hose companies may not always have been amicable. The fire chief attended the meeting where he "instructed the company to leave number 2 cart alone after this." Although the aforementioned photo indicates Hose Co. No. 3 continued to exist after the turn of the century, the record of minutes ends with an entry dated March 16, 1898. The agenda of that meeting included a discussion of whether to accept the proposal by Hose Co. No. 5 to pick a racing team from the members of the two companies. "A motion was made and carried that we reject their proposal. There being no further business the meeting adjourned. [Signed] Virgil Ison, Secretary."

Over the ten-year span of the record of Hose Co. No. 3, the membership was in constant flux. Here are some of the young men inducted into the company whose names, or at least the family names, may still be recognized today: Wesley Andrews, Harvey McCord, Perry McCord, Joseph McCord, Nelson McCord, Ben Lachner, John Haskell, (Dr.) Virgil Ison, F. Littlefield, John Palmer, George Palmer, Charles Baird, Bill Biswell, Fred Snow, Fred Crabill, James Dealy, Jess Levens, Charles Cleaver, and Robert Haines.

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