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alongshore



By John Bell

At Burr's Barbershop last week, Jesse "Burr" Ferreira paused in his snipping when I came in. "Here's something to look at while you wait," he said, handing me an old-fashioned dance program complete with a cord loop for hanging it from a slender wrist. When I left, freshly-shorn, he let me borrow it.

The engraved scene on its front cover shows a steam fire engine supplying water to firemen fighting a conflagration. On the back cover, a hand-drawn, hand-operated pumper looks exactly like the "George Washington" pumper in our Provincetown Museum. Unfolding the program, I read in fancy lettering, "Grand Ball, complimentary to the Provincetown Firemen, Oct. 17, 1889." Under this, a message signed by J.D. Hilliard:

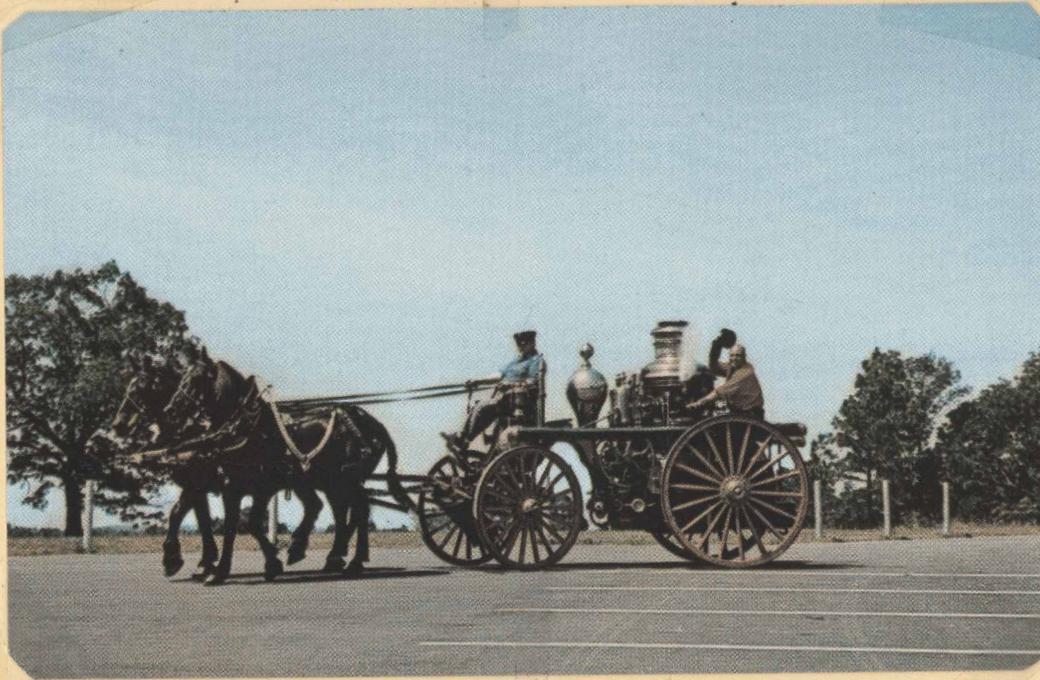
"After a lifetime given to the study of Fire Fighting, for the love I have for the business, for my kindly feelings toward every member of the Department, and for the honor conferred by naming the Steamer for me, I tender this party, trusting all may enjoy and profit by the day's festivities and that harmony may prevail always."

Jesse and I met next on Sunday morning in front of Fire House 2 on Court Street. As captain of the house, he was checking arrangements for Engine 2's departure to attend the gala opening of the new Firefighters' School in Hyannis. David Carreiro, son of Chief Frank Carreiro and one of the most faithful firemen in the department, would drive. I asked, "When is the new fire engine due?"

"Less than six weeks from now," answered Dave.

"Not like the old days," I commented to Jesse. "Thirteen months ago we voted to buy the new engine, and it's not here yet. In 1889 the town voted for fire engines in February and had them in September. Of course," I added hastily, "they were simpler machines then."

And life was simpler then too, I mused as I drove off. And a lot more fun in some ways. Would the arrival and demonstration of our 1972 fire engine be attended by festivities like the celebration organized in 1889 by Chief John D. Hilliard?



The "J. D. Hilliard" Steamer #3 - - 1970

Built by the Amoskeag Locomotive Works in Manchester, New Hampshire in 1898. Builders #693. This was the only steam fire engine used on Cape Cod. It is owned by the National Fire Museum, Inc. of Newton, Mass., Lt. L.N. Clark founder of the museum is the engineer

This engine is on display at Edaville Railroad Museum.

Business Before Pleasure

Then as now, firemen tested the new equipment before accepting it from its builders. I quote from an old Advocate:

"The trial of the Steam Fire Engine was in every way satisfactory. Fire was lighted under the boiler at 9:09 a.m. At 9.17 $\frac{1}{4}$, with 25 pounds steam, the pump started, after which the steam gauge rose rapidly. At 9.21 $\frac{1}{2}$, 100 pounds, at which pressure all of the playing was done. Two lines of 100 feet each, the 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ lines siamezed into one 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch nozzle, were eminently satisfactory."

The most skeptical observers were pleased when 1550 feet of hose, elevated 50 feet, produced a "throw" of 103 feet. Another test using a 50-foot hose and a 1-inch nozzle threw a 237-foot stream of water. "The boiler steamed well, the Engine worked smoothly (and) it was accepted by the committee."

Former Selectman Ernie Irmer recalls that the steamer had fancy coach lamps on it, with cut-glass lamp windows. Says the 1889 Advocate, "Chief Engineer Hilliard, in whose honor the engine was named, has expended a large amount of money in adding to the ornamental features of the engine."

And why not? Hilliard, whose 1895 photo shows him to be a stocky businessman sporting a handlebar moustache, had joined the Fire Department in 1853. In 1871 he was elected Chief Engineer and served that post until he retired in 1896. Says the Town Report for that year, "By the retiring of Chief Hilliard the town loses the services of a faithful servant, the Engineers a careful and considerate advisor, the Fire Department an honored member."

Prosperous owner of Hilliard's Wharf where tall ships unloaded coal and lumber, Hilliard could afford to "put on a time" to show his pleasure in having the new engine named for him. For the dedication on October 17 he hired Martland's Full Regimental Band from Brockton to supplement the Puritan Band of Provincetown. His entire Fire Department paraded—310 firemen pulling six flower-decorated engines, with Hilliard's portrait mounted on the Hook and Ladder truck. Schools were closed, business suspended. "Visiting firemen" included Commissioners from Boston and Fire Chiefs from Pittsfield, Everett, Cambridge, Haverhill, Medford and Brockton.

That evening in Town Hall, "150 or more couples" danced waltzes, gavottes, polkas, schottisches and quadrilles to the music of Martland's Band. Then they formed the grand march, and the band played a new piece, "Hilliard's March."

Can't you just see the old man beaming?

Sold Down the River

Steamer J.D. Hilliard's last major fire, according to Francis "Flyer" Santos, was the one that destroyed the Puritan Cold Storage, where Flyer's Boatyard is now, about 1929. Chief T. Julian "June" Lewis reported in 1938 that inspectors had condemned its leaky boiler.

He sold the steamer, they say, for either \$25 or \$50. Today you pay to see it at Edaville Railroad's museum in Carver, Mass.