

**Whatever Happened to ...Palmyra Steamer & Hose Co.**  
**By Beth Hoad**  
**Palmyra Historian**

On Feb. 9, 2001, Harry White, on behalf of Palmyra Steamer & Hose Co. No. 1, Inc. presented a gift of \$1400 to the Palmyra-Macedon Educational Foundation. It was the wish of the three remaining members to support humanitarian and educational organizations in the area. To be sure, knowledge of the hose company is probably quite limited. Therefore, it is only proper that the story of the company be told in the words of its remaining spokesman, Harry White.

"The Palmyra Steamer & Hose Company was formed in the late 1800's and was incorporated in 1909. Through the following years, it was one of three active fire companies that made up the Palmyra Fire Department.

The company consisted mostly of Main Street merchants and businessmen. Village officials, officers of Garlock Packing Co. and other local politicians were also included. Some village residents looked upon it as the elite company of the department. They were also referred to as the 'Knife and Fork Company' as members enjoyed many social affairs during the years.

To become a member, one had to reside in the Village of Palmyra. If the time came that a member moved from the village limits, his name was removed from the rolls. The by-laws stated membership was not to exceed 50 members. Therefore, over the years, because interest was so great in joining the company, there were times when a prospective member had to wait up to a year before an opening occurred.

Upon joining, all new members were placed on probationary status for a period of one year. Then at the end of that year, if all the requirements of the company were met, they were placed on permanent active status.

Through the years, many changes occurred within the company and interest in joining declined. A number of the active members discontinued their businesses or left the area and, as a result, the number of active members fell. Age also took its toll on the active membership, and many chose to maintain an inactive status.

In 1959, the Sexton Hydrant & Hose Company and the Protective Hook & Ladder Company disbanded and formed the Palmyra Fire Company. The Steamer & Hose Company decided to remain as an inactive and social organization.

At that time, Donald Wilkinson and this writer [Harry White] were the only active members remaining in the company. In order to remain as active members of the fire department, we were both made honorary members of the newly formed Palmyra Fire Company. Don and I both served a number of years as assistant chiefs, and I had the honor and privilege of serving as Fire Chief 1977-1980. As a matter

of interest, I was the last member taken into the Steamer & Hose Cop. 46 years ago, in 1955.

The Steamer & Hose roll presently consists of three members: Arthur McKeown (who sadly passed away Feb. 22, 2001), Frank Palmer (presently confined in an adult care facility) and myself, Harry White.

As a result, the three of us decided to disband the company and use the remaining limited assets to assist and support humanitarian and educational organizations in the area. Funds have been distributed to Homer's Kids, Habitat for Humanity, Mercy Flight, Palmyra Fire Department Emergency Squad and, most recently, to the Palmyra-Macedon Educational Foundation.

Many changes have occurred in our lives, but we have many fond memories of our past with Steamer & Hose. The decision to disband the company was not an easy one. We are happy to have been able to play a part in the fire service of Palmyra and that we were able to provide some financial assistance to the above mentioned organizations. "

Thank you Harry, for your story. Assuredly, the people who have benefited from both the past fire service of Steamer & Hose and those who will benefit from your recent donations also thank you.

Some additional information has come to light about the company. The earliest known and documented membership list is from 1870 and includes the Valentine Natt, Manley L. Osborne, William H. H. Osborne, William Rushmore, A. P. Seeley, Abner Seeley, Charles Segar, G. R. Stoddard, Moses Stoppard, William A. Santford, William L. Tucker and Wells Tyler, Jr. Also, according to an early 1890's notice in the *Palmyra Democrat*, Palmyra Steamer & Hose Co. No. 1, with C. A. Sanford following names as listed in company records: William H. Bump, John Corning, Joseph Corning, Irving F. Eggleston, Amos Jones, James Kelley, Daniel Keone, William Laing, as President and Charles H. North as Secretary, met on the first Tuesday evening every month in their rooms in the Jarvis Block.

Another article referred to the company as it appeared at the Fireman's Day celebration in Newark on June 13, 1892 as follows: "The Palmyra Steamer & Hose Company, a fine body of men all well-drilled headed by the popular Manchester band formed a very important part of the procession. Troop, who enjoys a high reputation as a drum major was at the head. He was for the day the distinguished drum major. "

In a Feb. 1959 letter to Eugene Spangenberg, then President of the Palmyra Fireman's Association, G. Robert Milligan, Secretary of Steamer & Hose Companies stated, "The members of our Companies voted unanimously against disbanding. I have been asked to convey to you the notice

of this action as well as the reasons for the action. These are listed below. 1. The system of separate companies has provided excellent fire protection for our community. Why risk our good record by disbanding? 2. It has been brought to our attention that in a number of communities, where similar proposals were adopted, the experiment was not successful. 3. Should the Palmyra Fire Company prove unsuccessful, the community would be without adequate fire protection since the separate companies would have been disbanded. 4. We feel that the Palmyra Firemen's Association to which our Companies give wholehearted support is an effective means of establishing, maintaining and communicating fire protection policies among the different companies and their memberships.

Finally, there are strong sentimental reasons why the men do not want to see the Steamer and Hose Companies, #1, Inc. disbanded. These personal reasons, however, would not be compelling if we felt that Palmyra could better be served by another type of fire fighting organization. We do not agree that disbanding our present organization will benefit the community. In fact, we believe that the proposal contained in your letter would prove detrimental to the well being of the residents of Palmyra."

Thus ends the saga of the Palmyra Steamer & Hose Soc. No. 1, Inc.