

TORRENT ENGINE CO. NO. 1, ORGANIZED OCT 27, 1857, ORIGINAL FIRE DEPARTMENT

**By J.P. Edmonds
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The Legislature of 1847 after much discussion and many votes finally located the state Capital at Lansing. At that time, the territory now covered by the city was practically an unbroken wilderness. Only a small settlement existing at North Lansing near the site of the present dam across Grand River. The selection of Lansing as the Capital, naturally resulted in a rapid increase of population as in 1850 the town had grown to a village of 1216 souls and in 1854 the state census showed this had been increased to 1556.

Many of the early settlers came from cities and towns in New York and New England where they had been members of their home Volunteer Departments, so the organization of the Fire Company for the new settlement was soon agitated. A number of quite serious fires, some of the, suppose to be incendiary, occurred during the winter of 1856-1857 which, no doubt, hasten the efforts to give the town some kind of fire protection.

October 5, 1857, a mass meeting was held in the Senate Chamber of the old Capitol building for the propose of organizing a fire company, Geo. W. Peck was chairman of the meeting and R.C. dart, secretary. A committee consisting of J.W. Edmonds, R.C. Dart and S.E. Longyear, was appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws and report at the next meeting. This meeting was soon held as the old records show that the company met in the Representative Hall, Oct. 27, 1857. The committee submitted by-laws and constitution which were adopted and under which the new company was named "Torrent Engine Co. No. 1." The men signing the constitution and thereby becoming charter members were:

Geo. W. Park, R.C. Dart, S.E. Longyear, J.W. Edmonds, A.B. Bagley, H.B. Baker, N.C. Chapman, D.P. Edgar, N.W. Edgar, Wm. Kittle, John G. Darling, George K. Grove, F.D.

Knight, R.H. Marcy, H.W. Paddleford, B.F. Savage, H.H. Savage, J.B. Teneyck, A.C. Winters, E.L. Whitney, M Greenfield, Fred Sweet, H.B. Shank and T.W. Wescott.

New Company

The next meeting was held Nov. 3, 1857, at which time Geo. K. Grove was elected foreman and J.W. Edmonds, assistant, so the new company was quickly organized and ready to fight fires as soon as the proper equipment could be procured. The next move was to raise funds for the purchase of a fire engine, so each member was assessed dues at a rate of 10 cents per month, and a committee was appointed to solicit subscriptions. The Board of State Auditors was also invited to contribute. These efforts were apparently successful as a committee consisting of Messrs. Grove, Edmonds and Winters was appointed March 2nd, 1858, to confer with Button & Blake of Waterford, New York for the purchase of an engine.

A hose cart was also necessary and May 4, 1858, the company voted to let the contract to a local concern at a cost not to exceed \$115.00.



Soon after Torrent No. 1 was organized, another group of young men got together and formed a second unit of the department known as "Rescue Hook and Ladder Co." It must be remembered that these companies were entirely independent and did not come under the authority of the local government, although they both turned out to all fires and worked in harmony. It soon became apparent that some one should have command of companies at fires so a joint meeting was held May 19, 1858; for the election of "Chief Engineer". The choice fell upon Franklin LaRue, who held the office for some years, being succeeded by Geo. K. Grove followed by J.W. Edmonds and later by T.W. Wescott.

First Department

During the year 1859, another company known as "Protection Engine Co. No. 2," was organized at North Lansing, then known as "Lower Town". These units formed the first Fire Department of Lansing and were not disbanded until June, 1872, when the City Department was organized and all came under the authority of the City Council and then supported by taxation.

The engine company mentioned above evidently has some difficulty in coming to terms with Button and Blake, but finally reported that they had placed an order at a price not to exceed \$1,000.

The engine arrived in June, 1857. It was shipped from Waterford to Buffalo via the Erie Canal, thence by boat to Detroit and from there to Jackson over the newly constructed Michigan Central R.R. From Jackson it was hauled overland but halted about a mile south of the old Renton House so its entrance into town could be properly celebrated. Mrs. Sarah Merrifield who witnessed the event told me that a general holiday was declared and almost the entire population turned out to see the show. The Fire Company dressed in full uniform of red shirts and leather helmets marched to a point on South Washington Ave., where the Grand Trunk Depot now stands, and pulled the engine in

triumph to a new house on the present site of the capital Savings and Loan building on Allegan St., that had been built for its reception. The firm who built the engine had the reputation of making the best apparatus then manufactured and they certainly turned out a good job. The box was made of mahogany highly polished, and inlaid with stars, crescents and other designs. The pump and all other metal work, except the brakes were of solid brass. The brakes, one on each side were about 16 ft. long and connected to the pump with proper mechanism.

Ten to side

These brakes were worked by ten men to the side. "Manning the brakes" at a fire was a heart breaking job, so no wonder the Common Council passed an ordinance giving the Chief authority at fires to call on any able bodied bystander to take his turn on the brakes. The penalty for refusing was a \$5.00 fine or 10 days in the city "Bastile".

In June 1866, "Protection No 2" at "Lower Town" purchased another hand engine from a firm in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. This was also a fine job and a good pumper. Much rivalry existed between the two companies and many contests were held to determine which could throw a stream the farther.

In the early days the "Fire Boys" were leaders in social events. "Torrent No. 1" gave their first ball in Hosmer & Kerr's new building on Tuesday evening, Aug. 31, 1857. This "new" building was the old State Printing office located on Michigan Ave., where the Y.M.C.A. now stands. This Fireman's ball was made an annual event eagerly looked forward to by all the young folks. The Hook & Ladder Co., also gave frequent dances. Many of these social functions were held in Representative Hall in the old Capitol Building and all were attended by the best people in town.

Disbanded in 1872

As stated before, the Volunteer Dept., was disbanded in 1872 when the City Dept., was organized. The engine at North Lansing was sold to the village of Leslie and the one belonging to Torrent No. 1 to the city of Cheboygan, Michigan. The records reveal an interesting bit of history on connection with the latter sale. The engine being the property of the company, the proceeds were of course, to be divided equally among the members in good standing when the company was disbanded, so at the final meeting, June 11, 1872, sixteen members were expelled for non-payment of dues, leaving fourteen in good standing. These were as follows:

T.W. Wescott, J.W. Edmonds, M.J. Murphy, Ed. Roberts, John Arderly, G.Y. Lansing, Geo. K. Grove, W.K. Williams, W.A. Barrett, Andrew Gausley, sam Nrusch, Andrew Balch, E.H. Whitney and J. VanKuren.

The company took bonds of the city of Cheboygan in payment. These bonds were turned over to Hon. O.M. Barnes who sold them for the company so the proceeds could be divided among the faithful.

Found Engine

In the summer of 1915, O.L. McKinley and the writer found the old engine in Cheboygan. It was still in good condition. It was purchased and shipped back to Lansing and given to the Fire Dept. For some years it was kept at No. 3 station but in Aug. 1927, it was turned over to the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, where it will be carefully preserved as a valuable relic of bygone days.

During its term of existence from 1858-1872, "Torrent No. 1" admitted scores of men to membership, many of whom left their mark on the early history of Lansing. All of them were pioneers and helped give Lansing its start, resulting in our beautiful city today. A careful search of old records shows that of the many men who were at the time members of the company, not one is still with us, the last being the highly esteemed old citizen of Lansing Myron Green.