

The Round Top (Texas Volunteer) Fire Company The Pumper Fire Wagon

The Round Top Fire Company (RT FC) used two generations of horse and/or men drawn equipped wagons to fight fires during the first half of the 20th Century. Generation No. 2 of these wagons still exists and is stored for public display in a museum building known as the “Pumper Barn” on the grounds of the Round Top Area Historical Society located at 397 E. Mill Street (Kneip Road) in Round Top, Texas. This surviving wagon is also referred to as the pumper wagon. It was a stretched version of the earlier wagon and strengthened with an all-steel chassis reportedly taken from a late 1920’s or early 1930’s automobile. It rolled on 4 rubber tired wheels mounted to steel hubs and cross axels. This wagon carried the additional weight of water stored in metal tanks.

The earlier Generation No. 1 fire wagon, which had gone into service in about 1904, was a conventional wooden wagon with spoked wheels. This earlier wagon required troughs and ponds for a source of water and carried hoses, buckets and a hand-operated pumping mechanism to dispense water in a high-pressure capacity. When not in use, this fire wagon was stored in a shed on Live Oak Street between the Fricke Store and the 2-story Court House, which was built in 1884. These buildings, which were situated on what is referred to today as Henkel Square, faced the town common, where the present-day Court House (built 1925) now stands. Unfortunately, a fire in 1924 destroyed the Fricke Store, the Fire Wagon Shed and the 2-story Court House. The pumper wagon, however, was saved and used to fight this same fire.

Friederike Recknagel, the noted late 19th and early 20th Century Round Top area professional photographer, recorded the earlier Generation No. 1 all-wooden, pumper wagon in a photo with members of the Round Top Fire Company. The backdrop to the photograph shows the Fricke Store and the Fire Wagon Shed buildings. This photo image was probably taken when this pumper wagon was new and can be dated about 1904. It appears that parts of the Generation No. 1 pumper wagon were transferred to the Generation No. 2 pumper wagon including but not limited to the hoses and its storage wheel rack and the hand-operated pumping mechanism.

It has been reported that a motorized truck was added to the RT FC in the early 1940’s, which in turn was replaced by a new 1950 Ford Fire Engine. The earlier truck was given to neighboring town of Warrenton for its use. In the 1960’s, Warrenton petitioned for a merger, and the resulting Round Top-Warrenton Volunteer Fire Department (RT-W VFT) was formed. A that time, a new Ford Fire Engine was purchased for the Warrenton station. In the 1970’s, an International Fire Engine was purchased for the Round Top station to supplement the aging 1950 Ford truck. In the early 1990’s, a Chevrolet Tanker Truck was built, and the old 1950 Ford truck was sold at auction. After those meager beginnings, a fleet of new equipment has been purchased to replace all the aging trucks.

One of the last usages of the Generation No. 2 Pumper wagon was during the early 1960's when Don Nagel's garage burned to the ground. Dennis "Flunkie" Sacks and Clifton "Noodie" Giese were the reported pumpers.

The RT-W VFD donated the pumper wagon to the Round Top Area Historical Society (RTAHS) during the 1990's. Georgia Tubbs, member and founder of this society, accepted the donation and stored the pumper wagon in her barn. After a bad storm, Georgia solicited the help of Rose Diers to cover the pumper to protect it from the elements. Her barn had become drafty and subject to leaks.

Herman Carl Rummel served as Fire Chief of the RT FC between 1902-1904. At that time, Otto Poppe was Captain of the Hook and Ladder. Rummel would have been responsible for the purchase of the Generation No. 1 pumper fire wagon. Fire Company members during the early 1900's were Alvin Pochman, Walter von Rosenberg, Arthur L. Krause, Arthur Ficke, Ernst Fricke, Henry Dippel, Max Ginzler, Otto Poppe, Charles H. Schiege, Jr. and William Schulze.