

Article written by Chief David Traiforos, retired Franklin Park IL Fire Department, 50-year member of the fire service and UHFS member for over twenty years.

## THE SLIDING POLE

The original idea for the sliding pole came about by a resourceful Chicago Fire Fighter who devised a quick way to get from the bed to the rig.

It is true that many American cities lay claim to having been the originator of the sliding pole. The following is a true authentic account that will relate how the sliding pole, that symbol of old firehouses everywhere, came to be.

Let's start this story after the Great Chicago Fire of October 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of 1871. The Fire Department like the rest of the city was rebuilding from the destruction. In the Chicago Fire Department like those in other cities, great rivalries existed among the firemen regarding their equipment and performances at fires. Pride in the job made the "Fire Ladies" \* to keep their pumpers immaculate, clean and in good working order.

The horses were still the king and was the only way to respond to calls next to pulling the equipment by hand.

In 1878 as in large cities Chicago was also introduction to the firehouses "quick-hitching" of the horses for a faster response time. Competition between companies in certain busy areas to get out of their firehouses upon receipt of an alarm and to get water on the fire as quickly as possible was all the rage. The rivalry born of pride in one's work is the only way to explain the remarkable speed and efficiency with which these firefighters did their job.

Engine Company 21 located just south of the main business section of Chicago with Captain David B. Kenyon in charge of the firehouse.

Located nearby was The Fire Insurance Patrol No. 1 under the command of Superintendent Benjamin B Bullwinkle. This company was showing astounding records for getting into alarms at the same time as Engine 21. Between the two companies the competition was fierce.

The Insurance Patrol at the time had a device in their firehouse called a "sliding-chute". This was a chute protruding through the second floor from the bunkroom to a platform just over the driver's seat of the unhitched wagon waiting below on the apparatus floor. This platform suspended about six feet from the ceiling provided just enough room for the driver to slide down into the seat from upstairs while the other members ran down the stairs and began the "hitch". This setup gave the company a head start upon receipt of the alarm. It is believed that this was one of the forerunners of the "sliding pole".

Engine 21 like many other firehouses in Chicago greased or waxed with paraffin their banisters along the stairs to increase speed of the firefighters as they slid down them in their attempt to speed up the "push-out". Engine 21 also used a chute along side of the stairs.

As fast as this arrangement was, Captain Kenyon was not satisfied with the results.

In April of 1878 the members of Engine 21 were mowing away the winters supply of hay on the third floor of the firehouse. To keep it out of the way a binding pole had been stuck up through the third-floor door from the rack below. An alarm was received and the men working in the mow on the third floor slid down the pole to the rack, jumped to the ground and hit the tail of the hose wagon as it started out the front door.

This gave Captain Kenyon an idea. With out hesitation he contacted the Chief Fire Marshal Matt Brenner and asked his permission to cut a hole in the second floor of the station in order to install a sliding pole. At first Chief Brenner did not like the idea but with Captain Kenyon's persistence he gave his consent. If the idea did not work Kenyon would be responsible for the repairs and damage to the firehouse.

Captain Kenyon sent one of his men to a nearby lumber yard to buy a long beam of Georgia Pine about 4 X 4 inches. Then Kenyon went to work and rounded it to a 3-inch diameter and sanded it smooth. Then he and his men varnished it and added several coats of paraffin oil to it making it slick.

Finally, the pole was placed through the hole in the second floor and secured it. The first member of Engine 21 to slide the pole was George Reed, a former city policeman. The pole immediately became a success.

At first the pole was a source of amusement of the department. Then Chief Benner started to notice that Engine 21 was "first-in" on alarms considerably distant from their firehouse. In fact, Engine 21 often arrived before companies located much closer to the fire.

Another pole was installed in Engine 21 firehouse, and soon afterwards sliding poles were being installed in many other Chicago firehouses.

Other cities Fire Departments hearing about the sliding pole soon followed and installed this new device.

Later the first wooden pole was replaced by a metal one, the original one was taken down and cut into small pieces for keepsakes.

Captain David B. Kenyon was born in 1835 in the Bronx, New York. He grew up there and moved to Chicago in 1856 where he joined the Chicago Fire Department. His first assignment was to Excelsior Engine Company 5. He worked there until his enlistment in the Union Army in 1861 where he served until 1865 achieving the rank of Captain. He re-entered the CFD in 1869. Captain Kenyon was a man of more than ordinary intelligence and something of a tinkerer at heart.

Captain Kenyon acting as Chief of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and responding to an alarm on October 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1884 was thrown from his engine directly into the path of Engine 32's steamer which was following close behind. The steamer drove over Kenyon injuring him seriously. He passed away twenty-two days later from his injuries at the age of 49.

In 1880 the first metal pole was introduced and used by Captain Charles Allen of Engine Company 1 of the Worcester MA Fire Department. Worcester Headquarters of Engine 1 and Ladder 1 had a narrow firehouse with limited space for a pole. Chief Combs of the WFD requested Captain Allen to devise a metal pole which extended only a few feet from the ceiling and under which horses could pass. He procured a 1 1/4" inch hand drawn seamless brass pipe and inserted a rod of iron through it with a brass plug at the bottom and hung it in a loose ball and socket from the second-floor ceiling. It was a complete success, and many chiefs and firemen came to visit the firehouse to see the pole.

Superintendent Samuel Abbott of the Boston Protective Department (Fire Patrol) who was the first outside of Worcester to install a similar pole.

Chief W. A. Green of Boston soon afterwards placed a pole in the firehouse of Engine Company 4. It was the first full-length metal pole in existence

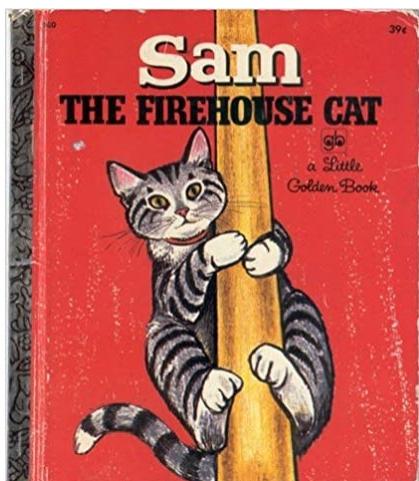
Captain Allen was the first permanent Captain in the Worcester Fire Department. He was a mechanic and inventor who devised many fire service improvements including a trip to open horse stall doors and a spider for hanging harnesses.

So, this is the story I have uncovered oof the "sliding pole" where it originated in the Chicago Fire Department and the story of its inventor Captain David B. Kenyon.

Next time you walk into a firehouse, and you see a sliding pole, or you look up and see a covered or filled in hole or holes in the ceiling on the apparatus floor remember the paraffined mast or brass pole that is still used or once was used by those firefighters who slid them responding to fire calls.

Source: The Famous Sliding Pole Robert A. Freeman Engine Co. 44 Chicago Fire Department

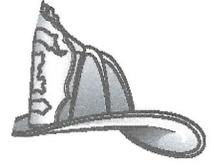
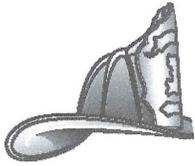
\*Fire Laddies a term in Chicago describing firefighters



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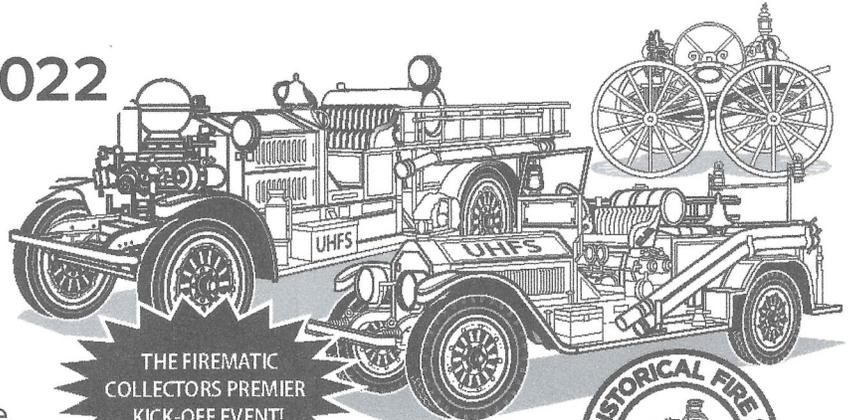
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## The 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual FIREMATIC ANTIQUA AUCTION

**Saturday, April 23, 2022**

**NEW 8:00am START TIME**

NEW FRIDAY PREVIEW 12-3pm

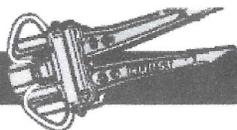
SATURDAY PREVIEW 7-8am

### Admission:

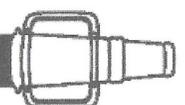
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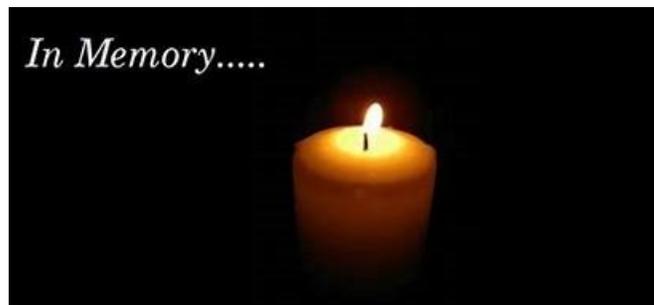


**Food and Refreshments available!**





Patricia Anne Laun, 80, of Syracuse and Cape Vincent, passed away on Friday, December 3rd surrounded by her loving family after a brave battle with cancer. She was office manager at EW Edwards until she started her family with her childhood love and late husband of 60 years, H. Thomas Laun.



Marie K. Lathrop, 95, of Allentown died peacefully Thursday December 23rd. She was the beloved wife of UHFS founding member and past president, Stuart Lathrop, of 62 years before his passing in 2018.

# October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 WFD Parade and Muster, Wilmington, DE





Goodwill Fire Co. No.1's 1919 Ahrens-Fox Pumper, MK-4, Registration #861 purchased on June 21, 1918 (upper left corner)

Wilmington Manor's 1928 USFACO (upper right corner)

UHFS members Jeff Jennings and Butch Tickner selling their wares.

UHFS member Scott Seifert's 1959 B-85 Mack with 1000 GPM/1500 Gallon Tank (left and bottom)



# S.P.A.A.M.F.A.A.

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- Visit Cape Canaveral Fire Department & training center
- Tampa Fire Department Tour
- Lake Ridge Winery
- Tour to Daytona for the Daytona 500 Experience
- Keynote speaker – Doug Klink – Reliance Restorations
- Cash Awards & Trophies for Apparatus Entered into our Muster
- Two Free Nights Lodging - Register Early to be entered into a drawing
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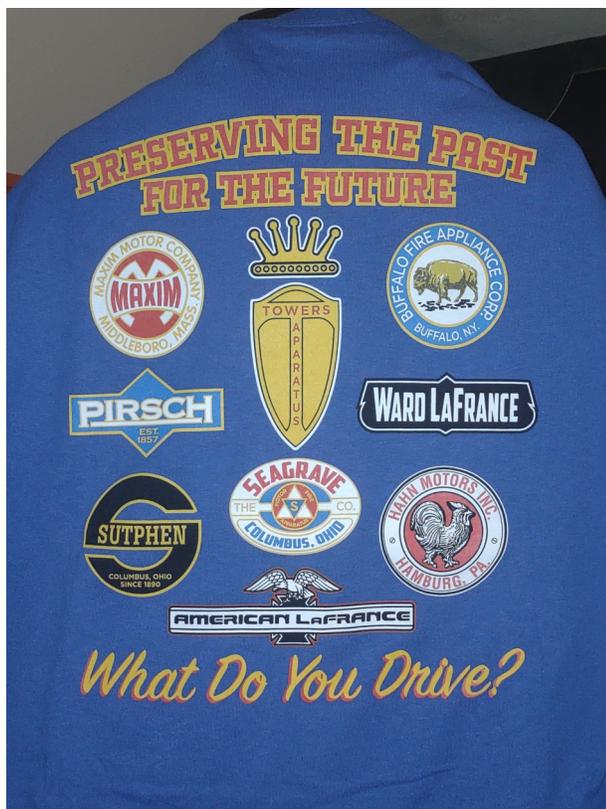
## FIRE ANTIQUES

By: Ryan & Elyse TreDenick

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