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## **Hanford Fire Department**

The City of Hanford was founded in 1877 when the Southern Pacific Railway built a spur track from Goshen Junction west towards the Coast Mountains. What is now the city was once a Chinese sheep camp. The Chinese quickly adapted and in 1877 created what is known as China Alley, a collection of Chinese businesses and a Taoist temple that became a city within a city.

The early city was built of wood, so they created a volunteer fire department in about 1885 to deal with the problem of fire in a matchstick town. Unfortunately, the town caught fire on July 12, 1887 and the fire completely destroyed the main business district, in spite of the best efforts of the volunteer fire department. People were up in arms...something needed to be done. So, there was talk of incorporation. But the thought of having to pay more taxes quickly killed that discussion. The businesses were rebuilt, out of wood again.

On June 19, 1891 another fire raged through town for hours, again devastating the business district. The very next day a meeting was immediately held to discuss incorporation, with fire protection as the catalyst for the discussion. The Tulare County Board of Supervisors was petitioned to hold a vote to incorporate. The vote was held on August 8, 1891 and by a three to one margin, incorporation was approved. The businesses were rebuilt for a third time, this time using brick.

As a further fire prevention measure, in 1894, the city installed a Holly Water System, patented by Birdsill Holly of Lockport NY. This consisted of a large water tank high in the

air connected to a steam powered pump which was used to fill the tank and pressurize the system. The water then flowed through high pressure pipes to fire hydrants below in the streets, installed throughout the downtown area. The pressure was enough to force the water out the end of fire hoses without the need for a steam pumper or a hand operated pumper. The system also fed drinking water into houses and businesses in town.

The presence of a Holly System meant that the fire department didn't need a pumper truck to suppress fires. So, Hanford didn't own one until after 1940. What they did own was a pre-1885 hand drawn hose reel, an 1880's chemical wagon, an 1890's hand drawn ladder, and an 1890's horse drawn chemical hose wagon with 700 feet of 2 ½ inch quality cotton fire hose.

If you don't know what a chemical is....A chemical wagon has two chemical tanks and a water tank...one chemical tank has sulfuric acid and the other has sodium bicarbonate. The two are mixed to create pressurized carbon dioxide. That pressure forces water out of a hose to squirt on a fire. Chemical trucks were very popular well into the 1920's, and were the fore-fathers of modern hand held fire extinguishers.

In 1911 Hanford bought a brand new gasoline powered Seagrave chemical hose wagon with two 40 gallon chemical tanks. That truck was last used in 1943. In 1922 they bought another Seagrave chemical hose wagon.

It wasn't until 1941 that they finally bought an actual pumper truck. This was a 1941 White WA 18 with a Van Pelt apparatus body, a 500 gallon per minute pump, and a 300 gallon water tank. In 1942 they bought another White WA18/Van Pelt identical to the first, but this one had a ladder rack with two very long wooden ladders on top. The Whites also had what is called a squirrel tail hose wrapping around

the front of the grille and hood, used as the hard suction hose.

Van Pelt was a fire apparatus manufacturer that was located in Oakdale, Ca. Van Pelts were very popular in California, with lots of cities buying Van Pelt apparatus bodies. Van Pelt began as a Dodge dealership in Oakdale in the early 1920's, building their first fire truck body, on a Dodge truck, in 1929 or so. Many of their early fire trucks were on Dodge trucks, but later they would build a body on any truck. Case in point, Hanford bought a 1953 Kenworth 721 and had a Van Pelt body installed with a 1250 GPM pump and a 400 gallon water tank.

In 1953, the Hanford Fire Department also purchased a smaller Studebaker truck with a Curtis/Earl Sherman apparatus body. This truck had a 250 GPM pump, a 300 gallon water tank, and an overhead ladder rack. It had a one inch hose reel in the back, but this truck was mainly used as a fire prevention truck, not a first out fire suppression unit. It was later purchased by the Hanford Chamber of Commerce, and with the ladder rack and tank removed, and chairs and a canopy installed over the hose bed, it became Freddie the Fire Truck.

Hanford bought two more Van Pelt pumper apparatus units, a 1963 GMC L 7011 tilt cab truck and a 1976 Ford C 8000. A list of 12 or more modern fire trucks would be purchased after those. But really after the early 1970's, most fire trucks look like giant red shoe boxes and my interest in them diminishes exponentially.