

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

This is my third commentary on the Eureka Volunteer Fire Department. During their heyday in the fifties and sixties, eight companies consisted of two hundred men from all walks of life. Every year, during the month of February, a celebration was in order. Each fire company sold tickets for the Fireman's Ball in their designated section of town. The dance was held at the municipal auditorium and was one of the large social events of the year. Ticket sales were always brisk. It was common to walk up to a citizen's door, have the door open before you could ring the bell, with the lady of the house standing there with money in hand. The event was always with a packed house. Many of the elderly came, not to dance, but to watch the Grand March. Seeing two hundred volunteers, with their ladies, participate in the Grand March was an impressive sight. The men dressed in their black trousers and red shirts emblazoned with the number of their company, except for the Hook and Ladder Company whose members wore white shirts emblazoned with "H & L", with the ladies dressed in evening apparel. The colorful retinue almost filled the auditorium main floor. Of course, they were led by the Fire Chief and his officers in their dress uniforms. After the intricate maneuvers of the march to the music of a local dance band, the firemen and their ladies would have the first dance. On Washington's Birthday, the hose laying contest was held followed by a stag dinner. Each company held its own dinner, some prepared by the members and others held in local restaurants. The hose laying contest had each fire company laying hose from fire engine to hydrant and getting water through the nozzle in the shortest length of time with no leaks at the hose couplings. The routine for each company was the same and each crew consisted of about six members. Straws were drawn to determine the order in which each company would perform. Our Company Three would invariably draw either six, seven or eighth place which meant a long wait. Unfortunately, one of our company members owned a bar nearby and for some reason our hose laying skills became a little dulled by the time our turn rolled around. Each man performed his duties as quickly as possible and if the hydrant man was too quick and the hose lengths were not coupled properly, you had a wash out which was highly embarrassing. It has been fun sharing my memories with you and I wanted to recall all those wonderful people who made up the old volunteer force. One more thing; a volunteer in those days was exempt from jury duty to make him that much more available for a fire call throughout the day. That was in effect for many years and I still have my old certificate around the house somewhere.

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