

All Fired Up

Friendship Firehouse holds antique firefighting apparatus muster.



Alexandria Fire Chief Felipe Hernandez Jr., right, prepares to lead volunteers in maneuvering the 1851 hand-drawn suction engine into the Friendship Firehouse Museum during the Sept. 14 antique firefighting apparatus muster.



PHOTOS BY JEANNE THEISMANN/GAZETTE PACKET
Volunteers carefully guide Alexandria's 1851 hand-drawn suction pumper into the Friendship Firehouse Museum Sept. 14.

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The history of firefighting was on colorful display Sept. 14 as the Friendship Firehouse Museum hosted a muster of over 15 antique apparatus, including Alexandria's 1851 hand-drawn suction engine, to commemorate 250 years of firefighting in Alexandria.

Alexandria's 1851 suction engine recently underwent a conservation and was returned to the city for the event. At the end of the day, Fire Chief Felipe Hernandez Jr. led a group of volunteers in maneuvering the pumper inside the Friendship Firehouse Museum.

"It was the ultimate parallel parking feat to move the pumper back into the museum," said Gretchen Bulova, Director of the

Office of Historic Alexandria. "We appreciate the tremendous support of the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Company and community members to fund the pumper's conservation."

Antique hand-drawn firefighting apparatus from throughout the region lined the 100 block of South Alfred Street, including 19th century suction fire engines and hose reel carriages.

Suction engines, invented in the early 19th century, drew water from wells, hydrants, and other sources through a hose, and provided a powerful and constant stream of water. The first hoses were typically made in 50-foot lengths, and only a few pieces could be carried on the fire engine itself, so additional vehicles were created specifically to carry extra lengths of hose.

In a town of mostly wooden buildings, fire was a constant danger where open flames were used for heat, light and cooking. The Friendship, Sun, Relief, Hydraulion, and Star volunteer fire companies served Alexandria, fighting significant blazes in 1827, 1855, and 1871.

Friendship Firehouse Museum's historic firefighting vehicles includes the Prettyman Hose Reel Carriage, built in Alexandria in 1858 by coachmaker, and Friendship Fire Company member, Robert Prettyman. It was ornately decorated and fitted with two large bells to sound the alarm as the vehicle traveled through Alexandria's streets.

Through fundraising efforts led by the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association, the Prettyman hose carriage recently underwent conservation, returning to Friend-

ship Firehouse in 2022.

Friendship's 1851 hand-drawn suction engine is an example of the highly regarded powerful Philadelphia-style engines. Built by John Rodgers, a preeminent builder of fire engines in the U.S. at the time, it was designed for both firefighting and invoking civic pride. When first tested in November 1851, with over a dozen men working the "brakes" – the curved iron arms that powered the internal pump – the engine propelled water 155 feet.

Only about a dozen examples of Rodgers' engines survive to the present day. While Friendship's Rodgers' apparatus was repainted and repaired many times, this is the first time it was professionally conserved. Conservator Josiah Wagener oversaw the work with the pumper now on display at the Friendship Firehouse Museum.

The Friendship & Firefighting in Alexandria muster was sponsored by the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association and the Office of Historic Alexandria.



Children pose for a photo in front of the 1893 hand-drawn hose reel from Independent Hose Company No. 1 in Frederick, Md., as part of the Friendship Firehouse Museum muster Sept. 14. The hose reel was in service from 1893 to 1926.



A 1924 Bickle was on display as part of the Sept. 14 Friendship Firehouse Museum muster of antique firefighting apparatus.



A 1889 Silsby Hand Reel and Carriage from Junior Steam Fire Company No. 2 in Frederick, Md., on display Sept. 14 as part of the Friendship Firehouse Museum muster of antique firefighting apparatus.