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# Friendship Fire Company and the Fire of 1855

Nov. 17, 1855, was one of the worst fires, in terms of loss of life, in Alexandria's history. Started by arson at the Dowell China Shop, a three-story china and glass warehouse and shop located on the 100 block of King Street, the fire brought out the Star and Friendship fire companies, as well as other community members, to try to contain it.

Together, they managed to bring the flames under control. However, approximately five hours after the blaze started, the west wall of the warehouse fell and destroyed the first and second floors, killing seven firefighters, six from the Star Company and one from the Friendship Company. At least one account attributes the collapse of the wall to the storage of dynamite in the basement.

The partial collapse of the wall made the structure even more unstable, and those trapped inside could not be removed until the remaining portion of the wall was pulled down on top of them by those



The James Keene portrait on the Prettyman Hose Carriage at the Friendship Firehouse Museum.

PHOTO/FRIENDSHIP FIREHOUSE MUSEUM

lucky enough to escape. The last of the deceased were not removed until approximately 11 hours after the first alarm was raised.

James Keene, the Friendship Company firefighter lost in this fire, was memorialized by his company with his picture on the side of the hose carriage, which is on display at Friendship Firehouse Museum. The hose carriage was restored and returned to the Friendship Firehouse Museum in 2022, in its original colors. The Keene photo faces the wall of the museum.

The Star Company mem-

bers who lost their lives that day were: David Appich, William Evans, George Plain, Carson Green, John Roach and Robert Taylor. Star Company later turned into the Columbia Fire Company.

Evans, Plain, Keene and Taylor were buried on Nov. 19, 1855, after a procession passed through the streets of Alexandria and stopped at each of the firefighters' homes.

One account claims that more than 1,000 people crossed the Potomac River to Alexandria for the funeral procession, and that the services and procession

had between 4,000 and 5,000 mourners. In 1856, the grateful citizens of Alexandria dedicated an obelisk memorial for the seven firefighters who lost their lives.

It stands in the Ivy Hill Cemetery right inside the entrance of what was a new cemetery at the time. It is next to a granite fountain that was rededicated in 2001 to honor fire and EMS personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty, especially those who lost their lives on Sept. 11, 2001, in New York and at the Pentagon.

*Learn about fire safety in the past and present at the annual Friendship Fire Festival on Aug. 2. It takes place in front of the Friendship Firehouse Museum, on the 100 block of South Alfred Street, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Learn more about the festival here: at alexandriava.gov/museums/the-annual-friendship-firehouse-festival.*

*Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*