



---

# THE MUELLER RECORD

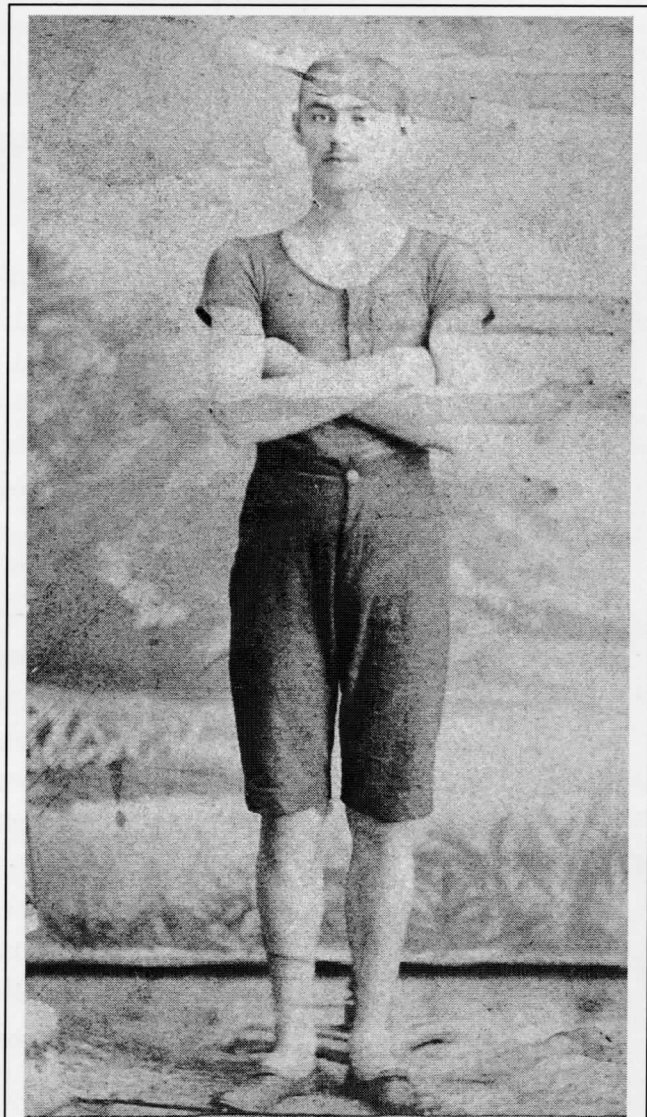
---

FALL 2011 NEWSLETTER

## MUELLER FIREFIGHTERS

Hieronimus Mueller is remembered for his role in establishing the first water distribution system in Decatur, Illinois in the early 1870's. One consequence of this project was Hieronymus' invention of the Mueller Tapping Machine which began a chain of events leading to the Mueller Company of today. Another consequence of the municipal water distribution system was a revolution in the way fire departments fought fires.

Before the day of water mains and pressurized water delivery, fires were generally fought using the old fashioned bucket brigades. When the alarm was sounded, citizens in the area turned out for the common purpose of passing buckets from whatever source was at hand, such as a well or pond, to the fire where the water was poured and then empty buckets returned along another line of helping hands to be refilled. The volunteer fire department consisted of a few men with some experience



Fred Mueller in fireman's uniform - 1880

and courage who actually poured the water on the fire. Most of the manpower (and womanpower) was provided by all able bodied citizens in the area. In fact, many communities imposed severe fines on those who failed to assist – fire was a threat to all and could devastate large areas or whole towns.

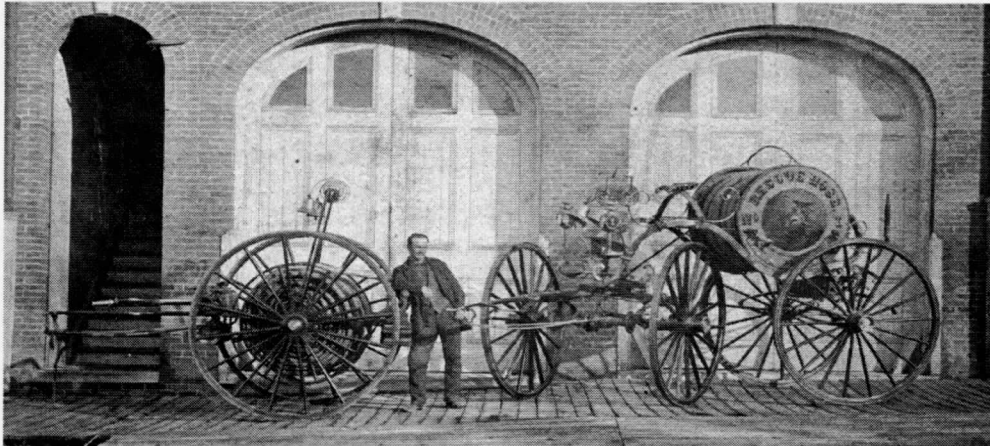
The installation of a pressurized water distribution system changed all that by eliminating the need for a line of buckets. The water now flowed through a hose and could be directed in a constant stream onto the fire. This required more equipment and training so local fire companies were reorganized for this purpose. Decatur saw the organization of three new volunteer fire companies in June and July of 1872 (the year that Hieronymus patented his tapping machine). The first two companies were hose companies with thirty men in each and the third company was a hook and ladder company comprised of 47 volunteers. Hieronymus was a member and officer (Ax Director) of this company. One of the more curious rules of this company called for a \$5 fine on any member using profanity at a meeting or activity of the company. That leaves us to wonder if the members were a puritanical group who would be shocked at such behavior or such a rough group that a hefty fine was the only way to preserve order.

Soon after the organization of these companies, a test of the waterworks and companies was conducted. A demonstration of the new equipment showed an ability to throw six streams of water over even the highest home in town drawing cheers from the assembled crowd. It should be noted that early water systems were pressurized through the use of pumps rather than water towers. The effect of this was that in the event of a fire, the central waterworks used the pumps to increase the pressure in the entire system to generate more pressure for the fire hoses. This created problems for home plumbing systems which were not necessarily designed to withstand such pressure. One of Mueller Manufacturing Company's early products was a pressure regulator which most homes had to protect against this danger.

Membership in these early fire companies was very selective with only the fastest and most fit applicants being accepted. Speed in arriving at the scene of a fire was critical to successful containment of the blaze and most firefighters sprinted to the site of a fire. Additionally, the hose carts were pulled to the fire by the men of the company. Great pride was taken in having the fastest company which led to formal competitions between companies. Young men with a reputation for speed were recruited much as high school sports stars are sought after by colleges. Decatur's Rescue Hose Company gained national recognition at such competitions and in 1881 won the United States Championship at the national tournament held in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Fred Mueller (son of Hieronymus) was on that team as a runner. Two members of the team, George Brett and Fred Litterer, were considered the best hose couplers in the world with a record time of 3.5 seconds to complete a connection. The team came home to Decatur with nearly \$3000 (a

staggering sum in 1881) and other prizes. They were greeted by a grand parade and speeches from the governor of Illinois and other dignitaries

These volunteer fire companies served Decatur until 1884 when the city moved to a paid fire department and the swift volunteers gave way to horse-drawn equipment. The Mueller Museum and Mueller family is proud of the early contributions made to these volunteer companies. The museum has on display a speaking trumpet used to direct the efforts of firefighters in the Decatur Rescue Hose Company. Now under restoration is a display of photographs and ribbons of the Hose Company commemorating their national championship.



**The hose carts of Rescue Hose Company, circa 1880.**

## **IN MEMORIUM – EVELYN COX**

One of Mueller Co.'s longest serving employees passed away on July 3, 2011. Evelyn Cox worked for the company over 55 years and retired only a few months prior to her death. Evelyn worked at many jobs over that span and became the answer person to all the many miscellaneous questions that arise on a daily basis. She loved her work and was a devoted employee of the company. Evelyn was a volunteer at the Mueller Museum and a valuable resource on company history. Much of her personal life revolved around boating and animals. She loved animals and gave many a home with her. Her family requested memorials to Decatur's Scovill Zoo in Evelyn's memory and has asked the Museum to pass along their thanks to retirees for their contributions to the zoo. Additionally, Mueller Co. has made a contribution to the museum in Evelyn's memory which will be used to recognize the efforts of all Mueller Co. employees and retirees.