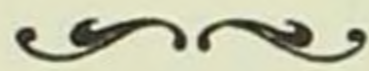


THE PALIMPSEST

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Champion Fire Teams

The city of Davenport was in festive garb to celebrate the Thirty-first Annual Firemen's Tournament sponsored by the Iowa State Firemen's Association. On the first day, August 4, 1909, thousands of visitors crowded into the city to witness the biggest and best tournament yet held. In addition to these interested spectators, there were more than a thousand firemen representing the volunteer and paid departments of cities from Council Bluffs and Sioux City in the west to Davenport and Clinton in the east. These athletes, for such they were despite moustaches and uniforms that must "not expose their person above the knees," had trained diligently in preparation for the great day. Superbly conditioned and mentally alert, they were eager for victory. The rich prizes totaling \$3500 were but added incentives for striving their utmost to win.

The State Firemen's Association had been in existence since 1878, though its articles of incor-

poration dated from 1886. It had been organized for "the protection and promotion of the best interests of the firemen of Iowa". The first tournament was held in 1879, and it became an annual event thereafter. Not only did the tournaments bring recognition to the efforts and skill of the firemen, but out of the keen competition that developed came improvements in methods and apparatus for fire fighting. In the early days the contests included races between companies pulling hose carts, hand engines, and hook and ladder wagons, besides individual foot races. Such events were still the major interest of the volunteer companies from the small towns. Horse races had been added as early as 1897, but not until 1902 did this feature become a regular event, and not until the following year were rules formulated to govern what came to be the chief attraction at subsequent tournaments. These races were confined to the fire-horse teams of the paid departments in the larger cities.

For the first two or three years the paid-department races were comparatively slow. As competition grew more intense, however, the rival cities exerted special efforts to obtain fast horses as carefully selected as thoroughbreds. Various breeds were crossed to produce strong, fast, and steady teams. With practice came smooth hitches

and lightning hose couplings. As a result, the Sioux City team of Paddy and Prince set a world's record of one minute and fifteen seconds in the free-for-all race held at Clinton in 1908. This was ten and two-fifths seconds faster than the time made by the victorious Clinton team at the first race held in 1902. Although fire-horse races were held in neighboring States, the regulations were different. Only the Iowa tournament rules prescribed that the race begin with a bunk hitch instead of a running start. Consequently, outside teams never entered the Iowa free-for-all race which was advertised as open to the world. The winner of this race, or the winner of the race open only to Iowa departments, therefore had a right to claim the world's championship.

Sioux City's champion team was entered in the Davenport tournament, but Clinton, Davenport, and Des Moines all had intentions of winning. For several days before the tournament opened, eleven teams from six cities were in training at the Davenport race track. Red Oak and Council Bluffs had each entered one team; Clinton, Davenport, and Sioux City each sent two teams; and Des Moines, as befitted the largest city in the State, was represented by three entries. A skeleton fire house was built beside the track in order to simulate a real fire station. Speculation was rife

among those who frequented the track to observe the daily workouts. However they might differ as to the merits and defects of the respective teams, there was unanimity on one point. The record of 1:15 was in serious danger. "If our little mares, Bonny and Beauty, hitch well, then look out," said the Clinton men. The Des Moines supporters lauded the steady performances of their Fred and Mack. Davenport's Barney and Barney were admittedly fast. Sioux City had only to mention the feat of Paddy and Prince the year before.

The tournament officials met on the evening of August 3rd, when the team captains drew lots for the order of running. The positions were:

1. Pack and Pack, Red Oak
2. Lou and Herb, Council Bluffs
3. Bonny and Beauty, Clinton
4. Jack and Jack, Des Moines
5. George and Dick, Davenport
6. Paddy and Prince, Sioux City
7. Pat and Bob, Clinton
8. Black and Tan, Des Moines
9. Barney and Barney, Davenport
10. Dick and Dan, Sioux City
11. Fred and Mack, Des Moines

The teams competed consecutively, racing against time, and the fastest performance won, provided all the rules were kept.

The day of August 4th was ideal. Warm weather and a fast track heightened the interest in the coming contests. Business in Clinton was at a standstill, for a trainload of citizens and all the city officials invaded Davenport to cheer for their favorites. The horses and men sensed the competitive spirit that was in the air. All were on edge, eager and confident but not arrogant, for they well knew how closely matched the rivals were. The slightest slip in hitching or coupling might be enough to spell defeat.

The first event was the parade held in the morning. It was a brilliant spectacle, with the thousand marchers strung out for more than a mile. The bright uniforms, the blaring bands, the display of modern fire-fighting apparatus, and the prancing horses all combined to raise enthusiasm to a fever pitch. Muscatine, represented by 249 men, won first prize as the largest department in the parade. As usual, the "B. F. Mentzers" of Marion were judged the best appearing and best drilled company. This volunteer company, as was the custom, assumed the name of the sponsor who had lavished several thousand dollars in the purchase of uniforms and other paraphernalia. With their white helmets topped by large white plumes, white jackets crossed in front by blue bands and gold buttons, white gloves, blue trousers bearing

a gold stripe down each side, and not least of all, handlebar moustaches, the Mentzers justified their reputation acquired by exhibitions at such occasions as the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1892 and the St. Louis Exposition of 1904 where they earned presidential plaudits.

The afternoon contests began with two hose races by volunteer companies. In the straight-away race, four companies were entered. They ran in pairs, but the team making the fastest time was the winner. The hose cart had to weigh at least 500 pounds without hose, and be large enough to carry 500 feet of regulation hose, although 150 feet were all that had to be carried in the race. The distance to be run was 150 yards. Villisca, with a time of :29 seconds, nosed out the unfortunate West Liberty crew, one of whose men fell near the end and had to be dragged across the finish line. Villisca also won the amateur hose race in :34 $\frac{4}{5}$ seconds. This contest was open only to men who had never competed in a tournament race. The distance was 150 yards, but a hose coupling was made at the end of the run.

These contests were of the utmost importance to the volunteer firemen who made up the majority of the competitors, but most of the five thousand spectators displayed only a mild interest. They were waiting for the feature attraction of the

afternoon — the paid-department race for Iowa teams.

The first two competitors, Red Oak and Council Bluffs, did not excite the crowd. Their times, 1:29 and 1:17 respectively, were not fast. Some horsemen predicted a great future for Lou and Herb of Council Bluffs, however, and these prophecies were destined to come true. If the big, dun-colored colts could be taught to hitch, they would be top performers, for they were fast and springy, like greyhounds. On the last day of the tournament, August 6th, they ran a straightaway race of one-half mile with a running start in the record time of :58 $\frac{4}{5}$ seconds.

But here was the third entry, Clinton, represented by bay Bonny and black Beauty. These little mares were fast, but poor hitchers. Beauty especially was likely to run past the collar or turn completely around before the harness could be settled over her. Would they hitch? All Clinton held its breath.

The starting gong sounded. Out of their bunks and down the poles slid the men, the hitchers met Bonny and Beauty coming out of their stalls and trotting under the harness, collars and lines were snapped, and away they went — a perfect hitch, completed in five seconds, with all four men safely aboard the 1800-pound wagon as the rules pre-

scribed. The mares fairly flew around the track. Before the first quarter was passed the spectators sensed that the record might be broken. The horses were urged on by gong and whip and the roar of the crowd. At the end of the half-mile run, the couplers jumped off the wagon, laid out 150 feet of hose, broke the coupling, and attached the pipe ready for water.

Everything had gone like clockwork — the hitch, the run, the coupling. Every one was tense, awaiting the timers' announcement. One minute, fourteen and one-fifth seconds! Four-fifths of a second under the previous world's record! The crowd went wild and the Clinton people were frantic. One could not hear his neighbor above the blare of the bands and the shouting. The victory was already being conceded to Clinton.

There was no interest in the following two races by Jack and Jack of Des Moines, and George and Dick of Davenport. Their times, 1:23 seconds and 1:19 seconds, were slow after what Bonny and Beauty had done.

Next came Paddy and Prince. Could they match the performance of the Clinton team? Chief George M. Kellogg of Sioux City was heard to intimate that they could. And they did! The hitch took only four seconds, the run was fast, and the coupling smooth. From the sound of the

starting gong until the moment the pipe touched the ground, only 1:13 $\frac{4}{5}$ seconds had elapsed! Another new record inside of thirty minutes after the previous one had been established. It mattered little that Sioux City's Dick and Dan also broke the previous record to take third place with a 1:14 $\frac{4}{5}$ time, or that two other teams finished in 1:15 $\frac{2}{5}$ seconds.

The tournament lasted two more days, and many other great deeds were accomplished by the "brave fire laddies". The other horse races, the hose cart and hook and ladder races, the ladder climbing, tugs of war, coupling contests, fancy drills, and novelty races all provided many thrills. But nothing could outshine the glory that had been won in the State paid-department race when Paddy and Prince established a new world's record (that was to stand for five years) and two other teams shattered the previous mark.

CARL B. CONE