



THE EAGLE STEAMER

The year is 1873. The Exeter Fire Department is in good company, having received a steam-driven 600-gallon per minute Amoskeag fire engine. Also, manufactured that same year by the Manchester (NH) Locomotive Works, 10 engines were delivered to the Fire Department of New York. Others went to San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Pittsburg and Newburyport.

The town paid \$4,400 for its new fire engine, a far cry from the over \$40,000 cost to the Exeter Firefighter Relief Association to rebuild the steamer in 1991. In keeping with the times, Exeter named the two-horse engine the “Eagle”. Much controversy surrounded its purchase, and a month after delivery a special town meeting was called to discuss it. The motion to sell failed, 158 to 88.

Exeter built a station to house the Eagle, complete with hose-drying tower at the present Green Bean restaurant on Water Street. The town also purchased a hose carriage. A team of horses to pull the steamer was housed at the station. On workdays, the highway department used the horses, always ever ready to dash back to the station to get the Eagle when the alarm of fire sounded.

At its acceptance test, the engine pumped through 800 feet of hose, throwing a stream of water that went over the Congregational Church spire. The Exeter News-letter reported, “Everyone was pleased with the trial”.

The engine worked many notable fires, including the Exeter Manufacturing Co., twice (1887 and 1893) and the Phillips Exeter Academy Building (1914), all destroyed. The steam engine was credited with saving downtown Exeter from a conflagration in 1885, described by the News-Letter as “the hardest for the department” in the 12 years since its purchase.

It also responded to mutual aid calls from other communities, and often would be loaded on a railroad flat car headed for Dover or Haverhill. In 1894 the Eagle steamer was loaded on a flat car with its horses, an extra supply of coal, and two horse carriages for a four-minute trip to So. Newmarket (now Newfields), where the firefighters were credited with saving the small community.

The Eagle was retired in 1928 as a front-line attack piece, when the town received its first motorized fire engines, two 750-gallon per minute McCann’s, built in Portland Maine. It continued working for the town until the early 1940s. Completely refurbished in 1991, the steamer made frequent trips throughout New Hampshire and Massachusetts to display its pumping abilities. The Steamer has again retired and can be viewed at the Fire Museum on Court Street.