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Baltimore

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523 S. Sharp Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
(410) 727-5770

December 13, 2012

Dr. Edward C. Papenfuse  
206 Oakdale Road  
Baltimore, MD 21210

Dear Dr. Papenfuse:

First, let me thank you for your kindness to the Ancient & Honorable Mechanical Company of Baltimore and our incoming President, Julius Eldridge, in agreeing to address the Company's 250<sup>th</sup> annual meeting next December.

*Jake*

I strongly suspect you have some familiarity with the Company and the part it played in "civilizing" Baltimore, the military history of its cadres and its firefighting activities, etc., etc. Much of that is found in the earlier relatively scarce formal history of the Company written in the early 1900's when no doubt the memory of man still reached almost back to 1763.

In case you don't have one, I make you a present of Carl Everstine's sort of summary published at our 200<sup>th</sup>. Our practice for many years, I believe, has been to deposit programs of our annual meetings with the Maryland Historical Society.

What you likely will not find documented anywhere is the history of the Company since it ceased active firefighting, and as I first learned of it in the early 1960's from those still alive and from my own later experience. (I followed my father and uncle as president thankfully young (relatively) when dragooned).

As you know, with WWII Baltimore began to change and while the old traditions and memories were passed down in many quarters, they were threatened with loss by attrition and mobility of natives to other locales. The Mechanical Company's continuance was one.

Down to just a few what I'd call "legacy" members and some other congenial Baltimoreans, the group was about to peter out.

Fortuitously perhaps, there was a lunch room on St. Paul Street called Bickfords and more commonly known in those days as "Ten Downing Street". Daily lunch there was the habit of politicians, City folks, businessmen, lawyers, merchants etc., the whole panoply of what was then still somewhat a tight-knit downtown Baltimore. They also did

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a lot of “business” there among their friends, many of whom they had grown-up with. A small group of them, the Mechanical remnant, facing extinction, decided to reinvigorate the group on a very, very limited basis that would insure its perpetuation – that being its only purpose. They believed that the wisdom of their predecessors in doing this first in 1859 would hold if anything would. Among that group were Carroll Hennick (designer of the Mary Jane Zoo Elephant House and descendant of BCFD Chief Engineer), Gene Hoffmeister (Harbormaster), Bill Hunter (Peale Museum), Carl Everstine, Cumberland Dugan etc., etc. They sought out men they knew of Baltimore names and others who’d enjoy getting together annually in early December for no other purpose than to have a good time.

Meetings migrated from The Emerson to Peale Museum to Science Center and now to Cross Keys. Studiously since, about 75 men gather, meet and greet, hear a speaker, listen to committee reports and then adjourn for another year. Membership is by nomination of a member and with no other requirements. We even waive the two-fire bucket per member requirement as they’re too hard to come by. Dues are \$5 and attendance is not required. It’s the best organization I belong to by far!

Since 1859 we do nothing but perpetuate ourselves. I did mention committee reports however; we have two. Historically, among our original purposes was “to keep pirates out of the Harbor and the Indians West of Catonsville.” Each year, a member reports for that committee on the success or failure of their efforts. The other report comes from the Chafing Dish Committee. All early menus of annual banquets refer in one way or another to “hominny served in a chafing dish.” That dish went “missing” many decades ago and the committee has worked to retrieve it without success. A report of their progress and near-misses is offered each year.

That’s what we do. We bill ourselves as the Oldest Civic Organization, second oldest fire company (after Franklin’s) and “public” library” (again Franklin), critical participants in both the Revolution and the 1814 defense of Baltimore (fabled Wells was a member), own the North Point Battle Monument (but don’t claim it) and have a slot or three open to members at the Baltimore Cemetery beneath our marble monument reproducing a 19<sup>th</sup> century fire hydrant. Other than a few of us mistakenly agreeing to “march” in the City’s 1989 bicentennial parade commemorating the Constitution (told we were the only group that marched in the original one, but in 1989 put right behind a mounted unit with no hokey men to clear our line of march) we’re done nothing else in the memory of man but meet once a year.

For our 250<sup>th</sup>, the consensus was that we do something “special” (have the benefit of your expert and knowledgeable rendition of who we are and were), and maybe preserve your remarks in a modest way for the edification of our member now and in the future.

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Hopefully, it would encourage those coming after us to perpetuate what most certainly is a singular tradition of Baltimore, so painlessly maintained.

Again, thanks for your kindness.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Ross Herdrickson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "R".

Rob Ross Herdrickson

RRH:lb

P.S. As a board member of the Library Company of the Baltimore Bar I also greatly appreciated your informative presentation there a few months ago. A bit more expensive and demanding post there, but nonetheless quite rewarding.

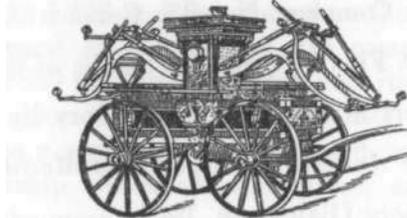
Enclosure

THE  
ANCIENT AND HONORABLE  
MECHANICAL COMPANY  
of  
BALTIMORE

1763 - 1963



**THE  
ANCIENT AND HONORABLE  
MECHANICAL COMPANY  
of  
BALTIMORE  
1763-1963**



**By**  
**CARL N. EVERSTINE**  
*Historian*

**Baltimore, Maryland**  
**1963**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, has in its library nineteen books of records kept by the Mechanical Company, including a Day Book, Minutes, registers, and library and other reports. Other materials are in the Maryland Room at Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore. The Box 414 Association, at 423 Gay Street in Baltimore, has on display many relics of the Mechanical Company and other fire companies; and several old pieces of equipment are at Engine Company No. 33, Gorsuch Avenue near Harford Road. Finally, extensive details of the Company and its members are in an earlier history by George W. McCreary, *The Ancient and Honorable Mechanical Company of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1901).

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## The Ancient and Honorable Mechanical Company of Baltimore, 1763-1963

The Ancient and Honorable Mechanical Company of Baltimore—for many years simply the Mechanical Company or the Mechanical Fire Company—is nearly as old as the City itself. Formed in 1763, some thirty-five years after Baltimore Town was laid out, the Company completed in 1963 two hundred years of vital participation in community life.

From 1763 until 1828 the Company was a military, social, and fire-fighting organization, with a wide range of community activities and volunteer fire work. It was incorporated in 1828 and for more than thirty years thereafter continued as a volunteer fire company and civic group. In 1859 the City's paid fire department was organized, and since then the Company has carried on its traditions as a social group. Always it numbered among its membership respected, substantial, and outstanding leaders in the community.

Baltimore Town was laid out and first settled in 1728. The little settlement grew steadily and by 1763 numbered perhaps 2,500 inhabitants. Being unincorporated, it had no organized community services, and it was this need which led directly to the formation of the Mechanical Company.

Fire was a chief scourge of eighteenth century towns, and until 1763 there was no fire company in Baltimore. Each householder kept a supply of buckets, and, from the uncertain sources of water, impromptu bucket lines would be formed to combat fire.

In 1763 there was a proposed lottery to raise some five hundred pounds for a market house, two fire engines, and leather buckets. Lotteries were a popular source of revenue in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Maryland, but this one failed.

Accordingly, on September 22, 1763, in the store of Melchior Keener at the corner of Charles and Pratt streets, there was a meeting of civic-minded persons to form the Mechanical Company. Other meetings were held during succeeding weeks; and on October 17 Melchior Keener was made chief, or president, of the Company. The name "Mechanical" was chosen because of the preponderance of mechanics and artisans in the Company.

From the very first the Company made fire-fighting its primary task. Until 1769 its only equipment was axes, ladders, and buckets. In that year it acquired the "Little Dutchman," giving rise to one of the most colorful tales of its long history.

In 1769 a vessel from Holland (reputed to have been the Dido of Amsterdam) put into the port of Baltimore. It had on board a small copper engine for throwing water on the sails in order to increase the speed of the vessel. Some members of the Company determined to secure the contrivance for fighting fires. A committee met (again at Melchior Keener's store), and the captain of the Dutch vessel was brought into the talks. "After much discussion and objection by the captain," the committee reported to the Company, "we struck a figure, seventy-three pounds and seven shillings."

The mechanism of "Little Dutchman" was mounted upon a carriage, to which ropes were attached that it

might be drawn by the firemen. An iron lever was used to work the pump, for forcing water on a fire.

The little machine served the Company for ninety years, and ever after was "Little Dutchman." Members of the Company subscribed to the cost of buying it, contributing variously from a few shillings to a pound or more.

For almost twenty years after being formed in 1763, the Mechanical Company was the only fire company in Baltimore. By the 1780's the town had grown to some eight or ten thousand population, and a number of other volunteer fire companies were established. Among the earliest were Union in 1782, Friendship in 1785, Deptford in 1792, and Liberty in 1794. During succeeding decades perhaps fifteen other companies were formed, some of which merged or otherwise changed their names and organization within a few years after founding.

The location of the Company's first engine house and lodge room probably was on Fayette Street near Bridge (Gay) Street. About 1775 the Company was located on Fayette Street near Calvert Street.

Membership in the Mechanical Company was no easy task during the years of the late 1700's. One did not simply "join," but was admitted by proposal and ballot. Once in, he was subject to regular dues or quarterage, which seems in the early days to have been the standard sum of two shillings. He obligated himself also to buy equipment and keep it in order. As stated on January 4, 1770, the first Rule was as follows:

We will, each of us in six months after entering this Company, at our own cost and charge, provide ourselves with two good leather buckets which shall be

marked with our own names and that of the Company's and shall be hung up in the most public place near our entrance door and be applied to no other use but that which is hereby intended.

The crumbling and yellowed pages of the Day Book for the years 1769 to 1789 give mute testimony to the rigid discipline in the Company. The members are listed for payments of "quartrage" and occasionally also for a payment of "subscription" (the latter perhaps being toward the cost of "Little Dutchman" or other equipment). In addition, the Day Book lists a long and startling variety of fines for all manner of offenses which to a less disciplined generation seem slight.

Thus, in 1771 one William Hackel was fined three shillings for "buckets out of place." Other fines were listed as for "no Bagg," "bag out of place," "buckets and Bages," and "no bagg nor Buckets in sight"; and occasionally, "B & B." The ultimate in bucket-and-bag delinquency came to one John McCabe, who was fined two shillings in 1771 for "no Buckets No Bags no articles no List."

Other fines during the 1770's were for "not working the engine" and "not coming in Time to work the fire Engine," both for two shillings sixpence. One member was fined sixpence when he "quitted the room without leave." Another paid five shillings for "neglect of the Engine," and another paid four shillings for "nothing in order."

By 1776, with the Revolution in progress and currencies uncertain, the early members who were not in the military saw their fines steeply inflated. In that year the fine was seven shillings sixpence for "absent," "not working engine," and "out of time." In 1780, the fine was fifteen shillings for "no list," one pound ten shillings for "bucket

out of place," and three pounds fifteen shillings for "not working engine." Before the inflation was over some of the fines were in astronomical amounts: ten pounds ten shillings for "not working engine," fifteen pounds for "nothing in order," eighteen pounds fifteen shillings for "not working engine and having buckets out of place," and finally the fine of thirty pounds for "keeping ladder away past time allowed." By 1785, however, with the Revolution over and conditions more stable, fines again were in more usual amounts.

Members of the Mechanical Company were highly active also in a great variety of other civic and military affairs. Military units during the Revolution were led and staffed by members of the Company; some thirty-five members of the Company are listed as members of the Sons of Liberty; others were in the secretly organized Whig Club, which opposed the rule of Governor Eden, the last colonial Governor of Maryland. About two thirds of the first City Council of Baltimore, elected in 1797, were in the Company, and the first six Mayors of the City also were members.

For many years the Mechanical Company and its members contributed their time and talents to virtually every parade or civic procession in the city. One of the earliest of such affairs occurred in 1775, when the Company met George Washington and other delegates from the states of Virginia and North Carolina, en route to the meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The Mechanical Company and three companies of militia attended the visitors, and the Company put on an exhibition with "Little Dutchman."

The prominence and leadership of members of the Company and of their families is well demonstrated by

the estimate that more than one hundred streets in Baltimore City are named for them. Among the old and well-established street and place names are many which appear in the Company's roster, including Aisquith, Stiles, Strieker, Edmondson, Calhoun, Garrison, Towson, Sinclair, Russell, Oliver, Presstman, Rogers, Pratt, Pleasants, Payson, Schroeder, Hollins, Lovegrove, McMechen, Hopkins, Howard, Holliday, Tyson, McKim, Gittings, McComas, Carey, Hillen, and Randall.

At a meeting of the Mechanical Company on January 2, 1804, a detailed set of Rules and Laws was adopted. The Preamble to this document stated that "It having always been found expedient in the wisdom of all societies to form for themselves certain Rules and Laws, from the due observance of which can only arise that harmony which ought to subsist among such societies: therefore, we, whose names are hereunder subscribed, reposing special trust and confidence in each others friendship Do for the better preservation from fire of our own and fellow citizens' houses, goods, and effects, mutually agree strictly to observe the following Rules viz. . . ."

Rule 1 required each member within six months to provide himself with "2 good leather buckets," each with his name inscribed and to be kept for fires. Rule 2 added "That we will on hearing the cry of fire, immediately repair there with our buckets and Engine and dispose of ourselves to the best of our knowledge, or the direction of our officers, for suppressing the same, and prevent, as much as may be in our power, suspicious persons from entering or carrying goods out of such of our houses as may be in danger. . . ."

Rules 3 to 8 provided for the quarterly and annual meetings of the company and for the duties of its officers.

Rule 9 established procedure for meetings, and Rule 10 described the use of white balls and black balls in the choice of members. Rules 11 and 12 fixed quarterly dues at twenty-five cents and set the procedure for giving notice of meetings.

In Rule 13 the Company showed its concern for surviving widows of its members, with a proviso as to the all-important buckets of those early fire companies: "If the property of any widow whose deceased husband was a member of this company, be in danger of fire, we will each of us give as much assistance as if her husband was still living, provided she keep her buckets in repair."

Finally, Rule 14 provided that members might borrow ladders belonging to the Company, if they were returned by sunset of the same day. Rule 15 specified the fines for a breach of any of the Rules.

Buckets continued during the early nineteenth century to be of vital importance to fire-fighters, although street hydrants and hose were shortly to be provided. The Minutes of the Company for its quarterly meeting on March 5, 1804, noted that "David Brown having had one of his buckets very much injured at the fire at Henry Long's Soap Manufactory appeals to the Company for a new one." A year later, in March, 1805, it was reported that five members of the Company "made application for new Buckets to supply those lost at the late Fire on Bowley's Wharf."

In the same year, 1805, a long and thoughtful memorandum on that subject was sent to the Mayor of Baltimore by a group of interested citizens. "Several citizens happening together one evening some time past," they wrote, "among the various subjects of conversation was that of

the great insufficiency of buckets at times of fire to keep the Engines employed—on account of which it is the opinion of all who were present a great deal of property has been lost."

A City ordinance at the time required the occupant of every house valued at a sum exceeding two hundred dollars to keep two fire buckets in good order hanging near the front door, and at a penalty of five dollars to replace them if damaged or lost at a fire. But, it was pointed out in this letter to the Mayor,

By this Ordinance carrying buckets to a fire is a voluntary act. A man hastens with his buckets to a fire, and there puts them in use; it is hardly possible for him to find them again that night; the next day he must quit his business and go far or near, as the case may be, to get his buckets; perhaps he finds them; if so, he has lost but half a day, more or less; but if he cannot find them, he has lost the price of two buckets and is subject to pay five dollars if they are not replaced in one month. Thus by endeavoring to be useful at these alarming times a man is exposed to the danger of losing money, besides time, in looking for the old and procuring new buckets (which time is as valuable to some of us as money), whilst he who, fearful of losing his buckets, lays quietly at rest while his neighbour's property is consuming, is at no kind of trouble or expense—subject to neither fine nor penalty—and why? Because he has complied strictly with the requisitions of the Ordinance, which, although it makes the buckets subject to the direction of the Corporation, and he is forbid to use them on any other occasion, yet he is not enjoined to use them on this; he, therefore, keeps them in good order and hung near his front door ready for the inspection of

the Superintendent of Chimneysweeps at any time and all times.

The Mayor's correspondents concluded that the taking or sending of buckets to a fire should be required, and that a public deposit of buckets should be kept so that the householder might get back two buckets after the fire.

Still another problem with buckets was mentioned in the Minutes for the annual meeting of the Company in 1811. A committee reporting on an examination of the Treasurer's books noted that "among the sums paid by him, is an item of \$60.50 for new fire Buckets to replace those lent to the City, at the time of Erecting the Bridge over the falls, on Market St. and we respectfully suggest the propriety of making application to the Mayor and City Council to refund to the Company this sum of money."

As hydrants and hose became available the tendency was to forego the use of buckets, and this neglect was the subject of a motion adopted by the Company on December 7, 1820:

It being well known that since the introduction of Hose to the severall fire companys, our members as well as the Citizens have neglected taking their Fire Buckets on an alarm of Fire as formerly, which neglect has in many cases proved injurious and as at the approaching season it must be expected that many of the Fire plugs will be frozen—Therefore Resolved, That the severall fire Companys be requested to enforce on their respective Members the necessity of taking their Fire Buckets to all Fires—and be it further Resolved that the Mayor of the City be requested to use his influence to the end that all the

citizens may do the same and that the foregoing be published.

In the end, of course, buckets went the way of automation. The Company's Minutes showed the change on January 5, 1826, when a committee reported that "the Rivetted Hose is decidedly preferable to the sewed, both as it respects strength and durability. . . ."

Meanwhile, the War of 1812 had engaged the attention of the whole country, and during it members of the Company took an active part in the Battle of North Point. The rolls of those who volunteered to resist the attack upon the City included many from the active membership list of the Mechanical Company, and one of the military units actually was called the "Mechanical Volunteers."

In September, 1814, the British—fresh from their triumphs at Bladensburg and in burning the White House—landed some five thousand troops from Wellington's Invincibles at North Point, where Fort Howard now stands. Advance units of the Maryland Militia met them some miles up the peninsula. Two Baltimore boys, Dan Wells and Henry McComas, there fatally wounded the British commander, Major General Robert Ross, and were themselves killed a few minutes later.

McComas was a member of the Mechanical Company, and it is thought that both young men were members of the Mechanical Volunteers at North Point.

Another member of the Mechanical Company, Aquila Randall, lost his life in this advance skirmish on North Point Road. Several years later, in 1817, the Company erected a monument on the spot. It is inscribed as "sacred to the memory of Aquila Randall, who died in bravely

defending his Country and his Home, on the memorable 12th of September, 1814—Aged 24 years." Another side of the monument announces that "The First Mechanical Volunteers commanded by Capt. Benjamin C. Howard in the 5th Regt. M.M. have erected this Monument as a tribute of their respect for the memory of Their Gallant Brother in arms."

During these same years in the early nineteenth century more volunteer fire companies were formed, until there were some fifteen or eighteen of them in Baltimore. The City encouraged them with annual contributions, in lieu of operating its own paid department; the books of the Company show in 1805 that it received two hundred dollars from the City, and in 1807 the Company received three hundred dollars.

In 1805 the Mechanical Company proposed to the other companies a "uniform system of constitution for the Government of the several companys in time of Fire." It contained seven Articles, fully providing for the duties and organization of a fire company.

Article 1 of these proposals required each company to appoint Directors "to keep at or remove to a convenient distance, from fires or from property, idle or disorderly persons whenever it may be found necessary to do the same for the constant or convenient working of Engines or for the better and more effectual preservation of property in time of fire."

Article 2 of these proposals outlined in close detail the duties of each class of fire-fighter, including Lane Men, Property Men, Property Guards, and Ladder, Axe, and Hook Men.

For several decades during the early 1800's—until the City began its own paid fire department in 1859—the volunteer companies were strongly organized, highly competitive, and at times downright rowdy. To the credit of the Mechanical Company, there is no evidence that its members ever forgot their first duty was to fight fires, and they frequently reproached other companies for obstreperous conduct.

In the history of Baltimore the stories of these fights and brawls among volunteer fire companies are many and racy, and there were instances in which some of the companies plainly and simply were spoiling for a fight. Several of these incidents involved the Patapsco Company.

Thus, it was reported at a special meeting of the Mechanical Company on April 2, 1835, that "during an alarm of fire a violent and unprovoked attack upon several of the members of this company [was made] by a number of the members of the Patapsco Fire Company accompanied with such language as induces a belief that it is but the commencement of a series of outrages meditated against the members of the Mechanical Fire Company." Again on March 7, 1839, there was a report of an "insult" from the Patapsco Company.

The fire companies in Baltimore made a concerted effort to eliminate friction in 1834, when they met and formed the "Baltimore United Fire Department." Each company was to send representatives to the United Department, one purpose of which was announced as "presenting the means of checking and keeping under proper control the emulation (sic) existing amongst Firemen, which at times have run into excess. . . ."

The United Fire Department certainly was not wholly successful in curbing violence among its members, and the fire companies continued to add color to Baltimore's history. The Minutes of the Mechanical Company reported quietly upon a resolution adopted at a meeting on September 3, 1835, referring to "the late disgraceful riots" among fire companies and inquiring if any member of the Mechanical Company or any person wearing its badge was in any manner concerned in the riot.

Nevertheless, the United Fire Department continued in existence. The Minutes of the Mechanical Company for January 19, 1838, mention an anniversary celebration of the United Department, with a parade and a "splendid collation." For that day at least the volunteer firemen put on a peaceful and spectacular show:

It was a gorgeous scene; a long line of twenty-five hundred Firemen; extending more than a Mile; the different uniforms of the different companies,—of Drab, of Blue, of Red, of Yellow, contrasting with each other; the cleanly condition of their apparatus, with ornaments of burnished brass, dazzling to the eye; the Engines decorated with festoons and flowers real and artificial, and fire axes and unlit torches; and banners and bannerets open to the breezes born by selected Firemen,—produced a pageant which gathered along the whole extent of the march, a mass of citizens, wondering but delighted. Even the Ladies from the upper Windows that looked upon the procession as it passed along tokened their pleasure, at sight of those they could rely on, to protect them from an angry element; with looks of gratification and of gratitude.

The procession reached Mount Vernon Place at about 2 o'clock p.m. and there the companies drew

up their Engines, Suctions and Hose Carriages around the Monument. Beneath that noble column, and about its basement, the Firemen deposited their Banners so as to cluster round the stand prepared for the orator of the day. . . .

At the Engine House of the Mechanical there was prepared a solid entertainment of things good to eat and good to drink; and the guests of this Company composed of the visitors from Washington City and of many of our own respectable citizens sated their appetites with our members; made friendly speeches; hailed compliments; and exchanged toasts—politeness and kindness being the elements of the occasion.

All through the first half of the nineteenth century the Mechanical Company continued its keen participation in parades and community celebrations of all kinds. In 1839 more than a hundred members journeyed to Washington to join a parade of firemen in the District of Columbia; and in 1840 they went to Philadelphia on a similar trip. In 1852 the Company made a five-day trip to Philadelphia. The members also joined in the elaborate funeral observances which were the custom of the times. One such was on July 1, 1845, to honor General and ex-President Andrew Jackson, who had passed away at the Hermitage in Tennessee on June 8 of that year. On this day, members of the Mechanical Company appeared in black suits, white gloves, and with crepe on their hats, which also in silver letters showed the word "Mechanical." They drew with them an "elegant" funeral car, ingeniously constructed over one of their suction engines.

Another notable community enterprise was the library operated by the Company for several decades. It was started about **1820**, and by **1850** held some 3,500 volumes

set aside in a separate room and with a librarian. When the Company was officially disbanded in 1859, the books in the library were given to the House of Refuge.

While the library was operating, it was a dignified and busy institution. Its librarian submitted annually long and scholarly reports on the progress of his work. In his report for the year 1840, for instance, he wrote that "the lapse of another year summons your Librarian to a duty the performance of which, he hopes may be as acceptable to you, as it is agreeable to him . . ." Three hundred and fourteen books had been added to the library in the preceding six months, and four hundred and twenty had been added for the entire year; and one hundred and thirty-five had been taken out, of which eighty-five had been returned in "good order." The librarian in 1840 was George W. Robinson.

He added that the library had been closed for three months during 1840 "during the great political excitement which pervaded the whole country" (i.e. the Tippecanoe-and-Tyler-too presidential campaign of 1840).

As an added feature of the library program, a series of weekly lectures was arranged throughout the winter. For it, the librarian reported, "the talent of our City has been enlisted in our behalf, and the plans will, without doubt, greatly enhance the pleasure and improvement derived from our association. . . ."

This program of lectures was formally started by the Library and Literary Association of the Mechanical Company, which had been organized on January 25, 1838. The first public lecture was given on November 6, 1839. Thereafter, at weekly intervals during that winter, there were

lectures on an amazing variety of subjects: Vaporization, Literature of the North and South, Love, Theory of Dreams, Immigration, Newspapers, Electricity, Physiology, Aurora Borealis, Moral and Earthly Greatness, Northeastern Boundary Question, Constitution of the United States, Reading for the Young, National Defense, The Senses, Botany, Grecian Architecture, Moral Law of Politics, Geology of Maryland, Anatomy, Heat.

The Library Accession Book, which listed its new volumes over a period of years, contains long lists of new books under such headings as classics, periodicals, travel, encyclopaedias, essays, biography, history, memoirs and autobiography, directories, and maps.

Another outside activity for the members of the Company was proposed in a letter dated February 9, 1840, from the Young Men's City Temperance Society. It sought to promote such an organization within the Company. "Looking at the strong and obvious claims of our cause to universal patronage," the Temperance Society wrote, "looking too, at the distinguished post occupied by the Mechanical Fire Company;—on account of its intelligence,—its talents,—its energies,—and the untiring emulation it has always evinced of taking the lead in all enterprises;—we could not reasonably anticipate any other result to our application, than a warm reception;—an attentive hearing, and the cordial cooperation of all the members of the Company. . . ." After considering this letter, a motion carried by a vote of 23 to 9 that a temperance unit be formed within the Company.

An unnamed but fervent female friend of the Mechanical Company took eloquent notice in 1840 of the fire-fighting work and community enterprise of its members.

The occasion was a special meeting of the Company on Christmas Day, at which time she presented a pound cake to the Company and in an accompanying letter spoke of it as "always foremost in the philanthropic endeavor to protect the lives and property of our citizens, and having observed with the same pleasure your rapid march in the beautiful fields of Literature and Sciences. . . ."

Despite the many attempts to abate disorder among the fire companies, it continued lustily throughout the 1840's. This was the period of the "Know Nothing Party" in the political life of the City; and finally, because of the turbulence and violence in the City, the General Assembly vested in the State government control over the City's police force.

The Patapsco Company continued to be the chief thorn in the side of the Mechanical Company and others. The Minutes of the Company for September 15, 1839, reported a "fracas" between the Independent Company and the Patapsco Company, "in which," it was added with some relish, "the latter received a just and severe drubbing—one which they have well merited ever since their formation—from their continuous disorderly conduct & the low character of the man *of fellows* of which it is composed—a disgrace to the Fire Department of Baltimore."

The dark suspicions of the Mechanical Company are evident from an account in the Minutes of August 16, 1840. There was a fire alarm by the Patapsco Company's bell, it was related, "which company together with many others proceeded in the direction of 'Old-town,' but it proved false & they soon returned with much noise. At this alarm as well as the one this morning, it was found some villain had by false keys or otherwise entered our house and tied the ropes of our machinery."

In the eyes of the Mechanical Company, the members of the Patapsco Company compounded their crimes by being inefficient as fire-fighters. Thus, in the account of a barn which burned on September 23, 1839, about a mile north of the City "between the York and Fall's Turnpike Roads," the Company's Minutes noted that "our *three* first pieces passed the Patapsco Reel."

Two days later, on September 25, 1839, there was a fire in a small frame house at the corner of Greene and Lexington streets. According to the somewhat ungrammatical account in the Minutes of the Directors of the Mechanical Company,

The 'Hose Carriage' proceeded up to the fire in fine Style, laid from the Plug at the 'New Market Engine House.' The 'Dolphin' arrived as soon as the water was there, and was put to work very quick, threw very pretty, and the Company was out very strong, in going to the fire the Patapsco was beaten out of their Shoes. . . .

Aside from the unfortunate by-products of inter-company rivalry, the task of being a volunteer fireman in nineteenth century Baltimore was monumental for sheer hard work. Except for a few small payments to key members—in 1814 the engineer of the Mechanical Company was paid \$125.00, and the secretary was paid \$30.00—all the members served without compensation, and each had a living to earn elsewhere.

There was first, of course, the constant hazard of personal injury. In 1827 the Minutes of the Mechanical Company noted soberly the death of William Evans of the Franklin Hose Company, who was run over and killed by the engine of that company while returning from

a fire. He left a widow and five small children "in a very destitute situation." A subscription was authorized in the Mechanical Company for the benefit of his surviving family.

The Mechanical Company did not attend every fire alarm, but there was the necessary task of receiving and assaying the alarms. Figures for the Company for the year 1857 were as follows:

- 491—total number of alarms;
- 68—fires at which machinery was not out;
- 166—false alarms at which machinery was not out;
- 141—fires where machinery was out but not in service;
- 116—fires at which machinery was in service.

One is struck here by the number of false alarms, which was one-third of the total of all alarms. Years earlier, on September 13, 1839, there was entered in the Minutes of the Mechanical Company the growling comment "the bells of the uptown companies are perfect nuisances—from the incessant ringing & jingling, there is no dependence to be placed on them—& our members have tacitly resolved to observe them as seldom as possible."

There were days and weeks when obviously the firemen had little sleep or relaxation. For example, the Register of the Mechanical Company has this list of fires attended for eight days beginning on Sunday, July 7, 1839:

Sunday	1 a.m.
Monday	12:30 a.m.
Tuesday	5 p.m.
Wednesday	2 a.m.

Thursday	1 a.m. and 12 noon
Friday	10 p.m.
Saturday	12 midnight
Sunday	8:30 p.m.

On December 24, 1842, Christmas Eve, the Company's Register listed these alarms and fires:

- 1:30 p.m.—chimney on Charles Street
- 8:30 p.m.—Exchange Place—'very cold'
- 10:45 p.m.—Lee and Light streets
- 12:15 a.m.—Company not out
- 12:30 a.m.—Pratt Street—'bitterly cold . . . The hose was so frozen at the fire that the members had to carry it to the home a link at a time.'

At the end of that grueling day, on which members of the Company had other and more personal interests, the Register concluded with the laconic comment "So much for Christmas Eve." The next day—Christmas—there were two chimney fires to attend.

"The last three days and nights," commented the Company's Minutes on February 13, 1841, "have been intensely cold." A year earlier, on February 1, 1840, it was noted there had been twelve inches of snow. A fire occurred that day in a chimney on Water Street near South Street, but "our apparatus did not go out—streets blocked up by snow."

Later the same year, on March 30, 1840, the Company was called to a fire at 3:45 o'clock a.m. "Owing to the new hose carriage being out of order," the Minutes related,

"we had to return to the Engine House and carry the loose hose on *our shoulders* to the fire. . . . The greatest praise is due to our members, as *nearly all out were equipped* and behaved manfully, returning about 6 o'clock in quietness and peace to their homes—however by request of the 'Mayor' returned and worked there untill 11 o'clock when an alarm was started up town . . . This proved to be false—and we are once more at rest."

Less serious but certainly vexing to the members was the interruption to their ordered pursuits at the Company's annual Christmas festival in December, 1845. A "festive board" and "sumptuous and excellent repast" were prepared, but just as the members were about to begin they were called to a fire. "The cry of 'fire' had scarce been sounded," said the *Baltimore Clipper* of December 27, 1845, "when, deserting the feast, they were at the scene of the supposed danger. Their intrepidity was remarkable. This little excitement only gave them a zest for the good things of the table. The act speaks for itself."

The Company's Register for the years 1856 to 1859 noted an interesting bit of community news which for once had nothing to do with fires:

On Friday, 5 February 1858, all the banks in Baltimore resumed specie payment after a suspension of four months and ten days.

The above is rather a digression from the subject of this record but it may be in future times an interesting reminiscence.

From its inception in 1763 until the end of its work in 1859, the Mechanical Company at various times had these pieces of apparatus in service: the engine "Old Lady;" the

suctions "Little Dutchman," "Comet," "Fairy," "Fame," "Dolphin," and "Alpha"; and the hose carriages "Rocket," "Jo Warner," "Snow Bird," and "Flying Dutchman." A steam engine, the "Maryland," was purchased in 1858 and received on February 12, 1859. Three days later this engine and all fire equipment in the City passed to the ownership of the new paid Fire Department.

Minutes of the Company for many years throughout this period showed an average attendance of forty or fifty members at monthly meetings.

About 1850 the Company purchased lots numbered 486, 487, 499, and 500 in Baltimore Cemetery at the eastern end of North Avenue. The lots are in Section E, about four hundred and fifty feet south of the chapel. They are adjoining, and in the middle is a monument surmounted by an old-fashioned fire plug. The monument shows the Company's motto "Spectemur Agendo," which may be translated as "let us be judged by our actions."

Three bodies are buried in the lots. The four tracts are listed in cemetery records as belonging to the "President and Directors of the Mechanical Fire Company." They are in perpetual care.

The colors of the Company were silver and blue. Until the early 1820's, the uniform of the members was simply a blue badge, with a name band around the hat. A regular uniform then was adopted, having a full suit of drab cloth. The hat, round-rimmed, was painted blue and had the name of the Company and a five-pointed star on the front. A blue oilcloth cape completed the uniform, having on it the name of the Company and several silver stars.

In 1829 the Company moved its engine house from Fayette Street, near Calvert Street, to North Street and Orange Alley. North Street since has been renamed as Guilford Avenue, and Orange Alley then ran east and west at about the center of the present City Hall. In the late 1830's the Company moved to South Calvert Street, opposite Mercer, and it was still at this location when it disbanded as a fire company, in 1859.

By an ordinance of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, passed on December 10, 1858, and effective in early 1859, a paid fire department was established, and all the volunteer companies suspended operations. A Resolution of the First Branch of the City Council, adopted on January 17, 1859, commended the volunteer firemen "for their adventurous hazard of health and life and great sacrifice of time and pecuniary means, without the expectation or hope of fee or reward, in the protection and preservation of the property of their fellow citizens."

The Company's Register for 1859 noted that on March 4, 1859, "the bell belonging to this Company which had for so long called us to duty, was taken down, having been bought by the Fire Commissioners for the use of the new Fire Department and will be placed in the steeple of Co. 3 (formerly Vigilant) on High Street n. Lombard."

Members of the Company still attended numerous fires in March and April of 1859, and for the last time were out to a fire at 4 a.m. on May 5, 1859, at the corner of Broadway and Thames Street. Five pieces of apparatus from the Mechanical Company were sent to this fire, but at noon on the same day the premises of the Company were turned over to municipal authorities.

At the meeting of the Company held on the evening of the same day, May 5, 1859, the members determined they would not disband the Company before December of the same year. By that time there still was business pending and property which had not been sold or given away; so another meeting was held in 1860. In the latter year the decision was to continue the organization, if only to meet once each year.

For a few years the annual meetings were informal and held in the homes of members. By the latter decades of the 1800's, however, it was apparent that the Company must expand and get new and younger members, else it would simply die out.

On April 1, 1891, a meeting of the Company was held at the residence of Charles L. Spies, 654 West Saratoga Street. The members issued a printed pamphlet which set out their problems and future policy:

Since the formation of this Company, A.D. 1763, it has been found throughout its long and useful career, to be held together by good will, harmony and brotherhood, and in especial trust and confidence in each other's friendship. Therefore, for the continuance of the Company's good name, we, the last surviving members do, by unanimous consent agree to continue our organization during our lives, and by the election of younger men we do hope that the name of the Mechanical Fire Company, organized in 1763, may live on, and be ever held in remembrance by its members' descendants, so long as the name of Baltimore exists. . . .

But it is to be distinctly understood, that the Organization is not to be beneficial; nor will any dues

or tax be permitted; but all will be required to meet annually in December of each year, to elect officers, and to participate in the customary Annual Banquet of the Company.

Except the regular Annual Festival, there will be no call made upon its members—nothing compulsory—save the continuation of the Association, so long as there are descendants in Baltimore to fill the vacancies in the membership, which is not to exceed fifty.

Following the policy established in 1891, the tradition of an annual formal banquet has been continued with vigor and enthusiasm through the Company's two hundredth year. The success of the dinners and the continuity of the organization for several recent decades have been due in no small measure to the indefatigable work of B. Frank Cromwell, for many years Treasurer of the Company.

The collection of programs and menus from those dinners gives a panorama of the Baltimore scene. Some were held in the Caswell and Rennert hotels, both well-known to earlier generations. A wide variety of speakers from every walk of life has attested to the interests of the Company and the prominence of the individuals.

Of the speakers, Dr. Francis Harvey Green deserves particular mention, for he had repeated invitations to speak and must have attended half a dozen or more of the annual banquets. He was at first Principal of the State Normal School at Westchester, Pennsylvania, and later became Headmaster of the Pennington School at Pennington, New Jersey. Other speakers have included such public and well-known figures as Folger McKinsey, the Baltimore *Sun's* "Bentztown Bard;" Dr. David E. Weglein

and Dr. George B. Brain, each Superintendent of Schools in Baltimore City; Dr. C. Hampson Jones and Dr. Huntington Williams, each Commissioner of Health in Baltimore City; Dr. Horace E. Flack, Director of the Department of Legislative Reference; Col. Henry C. Stanwood, Director of Selective Service; Governor Theodore R. McKeldin; Henry A. Barnes, Commissioner of Transit and Traffic; Hall Hammond, then Attorney General of Maryland; and Dr. John C. Krantz, Professor and Head of the Department of Pharmacology, University of Maryland.

For years the speaker at the annual meeting has been introduced by a member of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City. Aside from bringing to the Company a distinguished group of jurists, perhaps the most notable event in this well-established custom was the presence at the 1961 meeting of Judge Shirley Brannock Jones, the first of her sex to be a member of the Supreme Bench, and perhaps the first also to attend a meeting of the Company.

The Company has participated in only a few community and civic affairs and parades for many decades. Some of its members took part in a Patriotic Day parade in Annapolis in 1907; they were invited by the Mayor of Baltimore to be present in the celebration of Old Defender's Day in 1921; and in 1941—meeting four days after Pearl Harbor—the Company pledged "cooperation in matters of local civilian and national defense, wherein its members can be of the greatest service," and also to solicit its members to be air raid wardens.

In 1943 the Company became a member of the Centennial Legion of Historic Military Commands, composed of sixty military groups throughout the thirteen original colonies, having a total membership of some thirteen thousand officers and men.

The outstanding public appearance of the Company for sixty years or more was during the week-long Star Spangled Banner Centennial Celebration in 1914. In addition to honoring the writing of the National Anthem, the Battle of North Point also was being commemorated; and the Company had taken part in that defense of Baltimore. It entered a float in one of the parades, showing a miniature stockade and the Company's part in protecting Baltimore Town from Indians on the West and pirates coming in from the sea to the East.

During the 1940's and 1950's the Company's monument at North Point was restored. It had been erected by the Company in 1817 as a memorial to Aquila Randall, a member of the Company killed in the British attempt to conquer Baltimore by land. The restoration was done by Eli Buniavas, a Yugoslav immigrant. Finding the monument broken and lying on the ground, he spent his own funds in rebuilding and restoring it; and later he was honored by veterans' groups for his initiative and zeal.

Numerous souvenirs and mementos of the Mechanical Company may be seen in Baltimore, as part of an outstanding collection of fire department materials. They were gathered originally by the Veteran Volunteer's Firemen Association and later housed for a time in the Mansion House in Druid Hill Park. In 1936 and 1938 all the materials were transferred for storage to Engine Company No. 33, on Gorsuch Avenue near Harford Road.

Three pumpers, two hose reels, and a steamer remain at Engine Company No. 33, on public display. The vehicles date from the early, middle, and late nineteenth century. Apparently none of these pieces was used by the Mechanical Company, and two of them are from Philadelphia companies (though constructed in Baltimore).

In March, 1961, most of the old relics were transferred to the rooms of the Box 414 Association, at 423 Gay Street. They may be seen on Wednesday evenings from seven to nine o'clock. William A. Murray is the curator.

The Box 414 Association—self-confessed "frustrated firemen"—takes its name from the firebox at German (Redwood) and Howard streets from which was given the general alarm for the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904. Their quarters are across the street from No. 6 Engine House, which many years ago was used by the old Independent Company.

In the collection displayed by the Box 414 Association are all manner of helmets, buckets, banners, insignia, pictures, belts, and alarm boxes. Several badges and three hats from the Mechanical Company are included. Perhaps of greatest interest is the top of one of the Mechanical Company's pumpers, converted into a heavy, massive square table. Two sides of the table top have the words "Mechanical Company," and the other two sides have the motto "Spectemur Agendo."

In 1963 the Ancient and Honorable Mechanical Company, with pride in its history and traditions as the Mechanical Fire Company, completed the two-hundredth year of continuous participation in the civic life and development of Baltimore. For almost half that time the Company was a vital and necessary part of the community, actively devoted to saving the lives and property of the citizens of Baltimore. Its later role has been the more quiet but equally necessary one of preserving and cultivating the old ideals of independence, self-reliance, and community responsibility among a solid and substantial citizenry.

## PRESIDENTS OF THE MECHANICAL COMPANY

Melchior Keener	1763
Gerard Hopkins	1773
Adam Fonerden	1773
David Shields	1775
Valerious Dukehart	1785
Zebulon Hollingsworth	1789
James Calhoun	1794
David Shields	1799
Thomas Sheppard	1812
Thomas M. Locke	1830
Hezekiah Niles	1832
John R. Moore	1843
Thomas M. Locke	1845
William McKim	1855
John Dukehart, Sr.	1856
Henry Spilman	1857
John Dukehart, Sr.	1860
John Peck Dukehart	1875
John A. Needles	1891
James H. Smith	1892
Oliver C. Cromwell	1912
Hamilton A. Hooper	1945
Cumberland Dugan	1958
Harry W. Schuh	1960

OFFICERS OF THE COMPANY  
DURING 1962

HARRY W. SCHUH  
*President*

THOMAS F. HUBBARD  
*Vice-President*

HARRY H. REYNOLDS  
*Secretary*

C. WILLIAM BROOKS  
*Treasurer*

CARL N. EVERSTINE  
*Historian*

B. FRANK CROMWELL  
*Treasurer Emeritus*

