

Fire Engine "Old Goose"

by Steve Schoenherr



The "Old Goose" is Chula Vista's oldest fire truck still in existence today. It is a 1923 Seagrave pumper that was purchased new from Seagrave in 1923. It replaced a 1919 Ford Model T that was purchased for the old volunteer fire department in 1920. This early department was formed in 1912 but it struggled to stay organized and failed to respond to alarms, forcing the city to rely on the National City Fire Department. In 1921 a new volunteer fire department was organized and Charles Jordan became the fire chief with a salary paid by the city. When the new City Hall was built in 1923 at 294 Third Avenue, space was given to the firemen for their equipment and a new fire truck. The "Old Goose" arrived at its new home in September 1923, and Howard Jordan was hired to drive and take care of the truck. He was the city's first full-time paid fireman who also helped the police department that shared space with the firemen. On the 50th anniversary of the fire department, the *Star-News* reported, "During those early years, the fire department also helped out the police. Firemen were responsible for custodial work in city hall and at the police station. Care and feeding of prisoners was also under fire department scope and more than once, old firemen have said, a rambunctious prisoner was calmed with a few shots of water from the fire hose."



The "Old Goose" is in the center of this photograph made in 1938 in front of the City Hall/Police/Fire Station. On the left is a new Seagraves fire truck acquired from the state Division and on the right is the Chief's car.



The "Old Goose" was retired in 1948 when the Fire Department moved to its new Station No. 1 at 447 F Street. It disappeared for two decades until it was discovered in the lemon of a local dentist. In 1968 Dr. M. Brent Campbell offered it as a gift to the city, and efforts began to restore the antique engine and body.



The "Old Goose" was fully restored and is shown here in the 1980s when it was frequently brought out for parades and civic functions.



The last 25 years have been tough on the old bird. The "Old Goose" today is in storage in the Woods Fire Station and several attempts at restoration have failed. This priceless symbol of Chula Vista is ready for another rebirth if the funds and volunteers can be found to complete a restoration.

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