

"Colonel" - The Veteran Portland Fire Horse and Engineer William Wascher, Who Drove Colonel for 15 Years

Source - Oregon Journal Article April 24, 1904

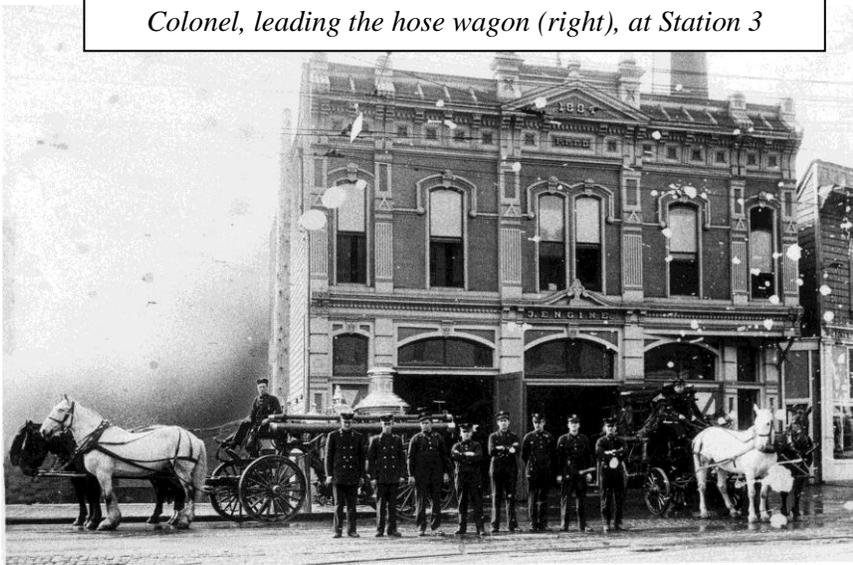
One of the best tributes yet paid to old "Colonel," the veteran fire horse of Engine Company No. 6, who is to be retired in a few days, days after almost a score of years of service in the department, came in a modest way yesterday from aged William Wascher of 530 Couch street.

Mr. Wascher's tribute lay in the fact that he walked down town to the Journal office to see if some mite of the small remaining influence which he said he possesses might not aid in getting a good home for the horse with which he saw more than 16 years of service in the Portland Volunteer Fire Department and Portland Paid Fire Department. The old firefighter, now well past the allotted three score and ten, retired from work last year, after a service as engineer with Engine Companies No. 2 and 3, that lasted more than 33 years, and he came down town and to the Journal office that he might say a word that would prove a boost for the old horse.

THEY WORKED TOGETHER

"I suppose you have been hearing a great deal about Colonel of late," said the old gentleman as he sat down, hat in hand. "Perhaps I can't say much that you don't know, or that you can find space for, but I thought I would come anyway. You see, Colonel and I worked together, and I just thought I would say something - even if it didn't get published. If you see fit to print any of my story of Colonel, why you can fix it so it will look all right in the paper."

Colonel, leading the hose wagon (right), at Station 3



"Colonel was a mighty good horse. He deserves all that has been said about him. And even I, who knew him better than most other fellows, cannot remember all the smart things he has done, or all the good work he has performed, not by a long shot."

And as he warmed to his subject, Mr. Wascher crossed his legs, settled back, and talked in a way on the life of this old horse that would have pleased any man who loves a horse. His story was

so vivid that an auditor who had never seen Colonel could appreciate just how the horse looked, could see this movements, how he had behaved at the critical stages in his life, how he must feel now that he

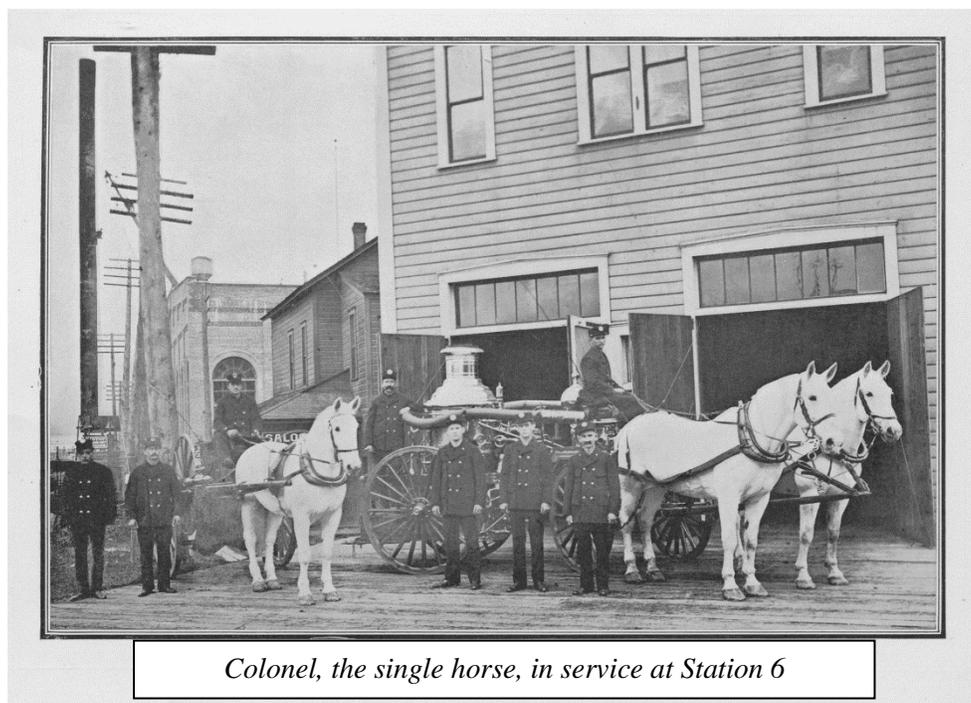
is to be shelved. Thoroughly aglow with the subject that had brought him to the office of the Journal, Mr. Wascher's declaration, uttered in the most kindly, solemn way, "I hope Colonel will get a good home. If I had the means I would take him myself." expressed the genuine interest that he felt in the matter.

None could speak with greater authority on the subject than he because he had labored in the same Engine Company with the horse during nearly all the horse's life. Mr. Wascher was with Engine Company No. 2 for more than 16 years and with Engine Company No. 3 for 17 years. The horse is now with Engine Company No. 6.

"Colonel was one of the most faithful animals that ever lived, and one of the brightest I even knew," continued Mr. Wascher. "He was bought when he was 4 year of age by ex-Chief Engineer Harry Morgan. That was 18 years ago. His purchase price was \$250. He was with Engine Company No. 1 for a short time, and then went to Engine Company No. 2. At the time of his purchase he was not a pacer, and during the first year nearly wore himself out dragging the old two-wheeled cart, the shafts of which flopped up and down against his sides, and then he got wise and learned to pace. He still draws that cart, now with Engine Company No. 6."

THREE HONORABLE SCARS

"In his career in the department Colonel was hurt five times. Once all the hair was burned off one side of his body, and he nearly lost an eye by flames suddenly bursting from a burning building beside which he was standing. He was burned a second time in the Dart Warehouse fire In north Portland. Another time he fell through a railroad trestle and was badly hurt. On two other occasions he was hurt by falling down while on the run to fires. He was a superb animal, and his wonderful strength restored him to service after each of his accidents."



"The Colonel was always a cheerful animal and loved children. A 5-year old boy could have driven him to a fire. For years the children, of the neighborhood in which he was stationed, brought him apples and candy, and I have seen as many as six youngsters on his back at once, while he proudly walked along with them."

HAD "HORSE SENSE"

"An instance of his sense was shows some years ago when the fire boys used to turn him out to graze on the vacant lots near the firehouse. As soon as he heard the gong, no difference how far away, he would come charging home to the station, and would get himself hitched up, make the run to the fire, and return to the vacant lot after the excitement was over. One night he got out of the firehouse and was lost, the gong clanged and the boys were without Colonel. Then came a fearful kicking from the grain shed next door. He had slipped out, unfastened the door to the shed with his teeth, and was quietly stealing a big night feed when the gong gave him away. The door had closed on him and he couldn't get out; so, after trying to free himself for a minute or two, he fessed up by pounding the floor."

"In those early days, the Colonel showed the abundant charity in his makeup by saving the life of this worst enemy, a Hibernian named Mulcahy who hung around the firehouse and teased him. That night, for some reason known only to Mulcahy, the latter climbed into the seat when the gong (coincidentally) sounded. Colonel made a jump for the door, and out tumbled Mulcahy. Instantly Colonel knew something was wrong, and reared back on his haunches just as the startled man yelled Whoa! Beyond a doubt he saved Mulcahy's life, because the latter would have been cut almost in two had the heavy wheels passed over his body at the rate at which Colonel was accustomed to shoot out of the firehouse in those days. Mulcahy never teased him again."

"It is a common expression to say that men grow old in the service. But few people in Portland imagine that the Colonel has truthfully grown old in the service. When he came to the department as a beautiful a young animal as I ever saw, his hair was an iron gray. As everybody knows, he is today a snow-white horse. He has truthfully, so slowly that few have noticed it, grown gray in the service."

"Now that the good people of Portland are taking up the matter of caring for these old horses, I sincerely hope that Colonel, the most deserving of them all, will get a good home."

FROM ANOTHER ACCOUNT...

Colonel, a white gelding, was reputed to be the fastest fire horse on the Pacific Coast. He would become so excited at the sound of the gong that twice he left the engine house before his driver was ready. Pulling his hose cart and following the steamer, Colonel deduced from its direction the box he was responding to, and then he galloped on to the hydrant nearest and waited to be hitched. So thoroughly ingrained was his sense of duty that once, when confined to his stall because of a lame leg, he kicked the side out of the stall in order to respond to a sounding alarm. Colonel put in 21 years of service and lived to be 33 years old, dying in 1915.