

## Raleigh's 1875 Rumsey Hand Engine

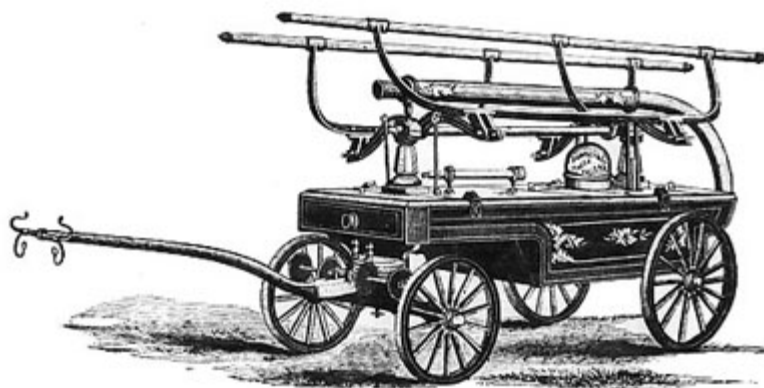
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Dozens of hand-pulled, hand-powered fire engines (called "hand engines" or "hand tubs") were used in North Carolina from the late 1700s to the early 1900s. The first in the state (correct?) were a pair of hand pumps delivered to Salem in 1785. The last might've been the 1906 Howe hand pump delivered to Smithfield. [See this database](#) by Legeros.

The Capitol City had five. They were delivered in 1819, 1843, 1853 (two), and 1875. All likely wheeled. The 1819 engine was purchased from Philadelphia. It's equipment included hose. The 1840 and 1853 engines are a mystery, with little or no surviving information. One was noted as having a five-inch chamber, an eight-inch stroke, and a "9 16" nozzle. The 1875 engine was made by Rumsey and Company.

Below is a catalog drawing of a Rumsey engine from that period. The specs are 16-feet long, with 31-inch and 37-inch diameter wheels. No images have survived depicting Raleigh's Rumsey engine. The side-stroke engine was purchased for the volunteer Victory Company around June 1875. The cost was \$1,700. The pumping capacity was estimated at 250 GPM, as recorded in 1878. Hose was likely carried on a reel, pulled separately from the engine. The apparatus was modified to be horse-pulled in 1885, and replaced by a hose wagon around 1890.

On November 10, 1883, the *News & Observer* recorded the prior day's exhibition of the fire company and their engine: "The Victor with twelve men at the engine made a run of 470 yards, laid 300 feet of hose, and had a stream of water on the imaginary fire in five minutes. The engine started from the intersection of West Martin and South Salisbury Streets at 7.34 ½ o'clock p.m. At 7.36 ½ the hose reel reached the cistern at the intersection of West Lenoir and South Salisbury streets; at 7.37 [a total of] 300 feet of hose had been laid and the nozzle attached; at 7.38 the engine arrived, and at 7.39 ½ had a stream of water upon the fire. Who can beat that record?"



Earlier this month, the Charlotte Fire Department brought their 1866 Jeffers hand engine to town. It was exhibited and demonstrated at the South Atlantic Fire Rescue Expo. Functionally, Charlotte's 1866 engine was likely identical to Raleigh's 1873 engine. Fixed suction hose, laid across the top. Single outlet for hose line. Two sets of "brakes," which locked into position. Two reels of rope in front, and likely knotted at intervals to assist with pulling. 'Twas a treat to see the other week, and to put into perspective what Raleigh's comparable 1873 looked like in person. See more photos ([set 1](#) | [set 2](#) | [set 3](#)) or watch the below video.

