

Burlington's 1940 Diamond T/Oren Pumper... And a Mystery

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Last month, Yours Truly had the privilege of photographing the Thomas Herman Collection. That's a treasure trove of antique fire engines, fire equipment, and fire memorabilia at the home of the legendary collector (and firefighter) of Chesapeake County, VA. (The occasion was a visiting photography group from that area.) [See Mike's photos on Flickr.](#)

Herman is an expert on Oren fire apparatus and has spent much of life researching and documenting the company's history. (His excellent book *Oren Fire Apparatus Photo Archive* was published by Iconografix in 2010.) His collection includes a number of engines built by the Oren Fire Apparatus Company of Roanoke, VA.¹

Most of the trucks in his collection served in Virginia. One is from North Carolina, this 1940 Diamond T/Oren (500/200) originally delivered to the Burlington Fire Department.





[See more photos of this beauty.](#) The truck also appeared in this Oren advertisement from the July 1944 issue of Fire Engineering. Click to enlarge:



What's the history of the truck during it's service in Burlington? Did the truck even have an extended history in Burlington? One curiosity has presented itself. The truck is missing from the summary fire department information included in the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of 1945 and 1952. Look at these excerpts below. Click to enlarge:

FEBRUARY, 1945

capacity 1,500 gallons per minute. 2 Allis-Chalmers centrifugal pumps, electric driven, capacity 2,000 gallons per minute each. 1 DeLaval pump, driven by Deisel engine, capacity 1,750 gallons per minute. (All above pumps at Water Works.)
58 miles of 4" to 16" mains. 300 double and triple hydrants. Average daily consumption, 1,980,000 gallons per day. Domestic and fire pressure in business district 64 lbs.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Volunteer. 1 chief, 1 assistant chief and 40 men. 4 paid men. 1 station.
2 American-LaFrance trucks, triple combination, each with 750 gallon per minute pump, 1,250' 2½" hose and 200' 1½" hose. 1 Pirsch hook and ladder truck with 240' of ladders, two 55 gallon booster tanks and 150' ¾" hose. 4 emergency pumps, 2 skid pumps and 2 trailer pumps (capacity 500 gallons per minute each).
Gamewell fire alarm system. 72 boxes. Alarm by electric horn on Fire Department Building. Fire alarm headquarters in fire-proof building with unprotected door to fire department.

FEBRUARY, 1952

pumps, capacity 2,000 G. P. M. each. 1 DeLaval pump, driven by Deisel engine, capacity 1,750 G. P. M.

69 miles of 4" to 16" mains. 392 double and triple hydrants. Average daily consumption, 3,700,000 G. P. D. Domestic and fire pressure in business district 64 lbs.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Volunteer. 1 paid chief, 1 assistant chief, partly paid. 54 men. 24 paid men. 1 station.

3 American-LaFrance trucks, triple combination, each with 750 G. P. M. pump, 1,250' 2½" and 200' 1½" hose. 1 Pirsch hook and ladder truck with 240' of ladders, two 55 gallon booster tanks and 150' ¾" hose.

Gamewell fire alarm system. 125 boxes. Alarm by electric horn on Fire Department Building. Fire alarm headquarters in fire-proof building with unprotected door to Fire Department.

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Explanations? Was the truck no longer in the department's possession by 1945, perhaps loaned or sold? Though that doesn't make much sense. Why would they dispose of a such a new truck? Had the thing had an accident and was beyond the capacity of the town to repair? Was it needed for the war effort, and transferred to another fire department (or location needing fire protection)? Another option is an error on the part of the Sanborn Map company. Could happen.

Most curious. Maybe readers can help here.

¹The company was a division of the Roanoke Welding and Equipment Company, which originated as an auto repair and welding shop opened in 1917 by Oren D. Lemon. They built their first fire truck in 1934. They began building custom chassis apparatus in the late 1940s, using a custom conventional chassis built for them by Corbitt, based in Henderson, NC. (After that company folded in 1954, they switched to an identical-looking Duplex chassis.) Their first cab-forward custom trucks were introduced in the early 1960s. In 1961, the then-named Oren

Roanoke Corporation was purchased by Howe Fire Apparatus. In 1976, Oren and Howe were purchased by Grumman. But by the mid-1980s, both of the brand names were no longer affixed to newly produced apparatus.

Sources:

- *Illustrated Encyclopedia of American Fire Apparatus Manufacturers*, Walter M. P. McCall, Iconografix, 2007
- *Oren Fire Apparatus Photo Archive*, Thomas Herman, Iconografix, 2010
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

Very interesting question. I had two thoughts that you addressed above. With WWII in full stride there is no question that it could have been acquired by the government or allowed to go to another department. It may also be that the 1945 map was already completed before apparatus delivery but this doesn't account for the absence in the 1952 report. My guess is that it never made it to Burlington. It would be interesting to trace its ownership back from its current owner. Hopefully we can find out.

D. Cates - 08/04/15 - 15:55

The date on the truck is November 1940, as shown in the above photo. That's a full year before the country entered the war. The advertisement appeared in a 1944 magazine, though the advertisement certainly could've been created in prior years. I'm thinking the truck was indeed delivered to (and served in) Burlington.

Sanborn Maps list this apparatus information:

1919 – One hose wagon, one combination hose and hook & wagon, two horses

1924 – One ALF triple combination, 750 GPM

1929 – Two ALF triple combinations, 750 GPM

1945 – Two ALF triple combinations, 750 GPM, one Pirsch hook and ladder truck that also had booster tanks (but was it a full quadruple combination). Also four 500 GPM auxiliary pumps, two skid, two trailer.

1952 – Three ALF triple combinations, 750 GPM, plus the Pirsch

By 1940, they were certainly due for a new pumper, as one of the two ALFs was at least sixteen years old. By 1945, and with World War II underway, they'd added four skid and trailer pumps. Maybe those were "in case of attack" equipment? Maybe a couple were assigned to the Fairchild aircraft plant, on the east side of town?

But the what heck happened to the Oren...

Legeros - 08/05/15 - 08:08

There is a good deal on this truck in the Burlington NC library in the reference section . It's located in a file relate to the fire dept,

George Whitworth - 09/18/17 - 22:48

Name: (real name
preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

Comment:

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

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