

## **FIRE HOSE COMPANY NO. 1**

By Jacquelyne Kious

Every growing town needs some semblance of police and fire protection. In 1892 SSF it was a justice of the peace and Hose Company No. 1 consisting of two volunteer firemen and one hose cart.

The town's founding father William J. Martin was a big supporter of the volunteer fire company and in 1895 helped form the Citizen's Mutual Protective Association to provide police and fire protection. The association purchased a cast iron fire bell that hung at Grand and Linden Avenues to call-out the volunteers who would run to the hose house and manually pull the hose cart to the fire.

Baden remained a law-abiding town through WWI. In the mid-1890s, more than half the population consisted of young, single men working in the factories and living in cheap boarding houses and hotels. How would they pass the time? The options were few in a town where livestock roamed freely, there were no phones or electricity, and saloons outnumbered churches 16 to one. Single men frequenting the saloons by night gave the town its early reputation of being home to rowdy, hard drinking factory workers. Despite the reputation, there was little need for police protection until Prohibition became the law in 1920.

Hose Company No. 1 expanded in 1903 with a loyal volunteer force of 25 men who participated in monthly drills. As the town grew, two more hose companies were added by 1907.

In 1910, the City Council established a *paid* fire department, but the chief was the only paid position. The department now had several hose and ladder carts but no fire engine.

Then a disaster happened and "*A hay barn at the Baden stock farm was entirely destroyed by fire...* It took 20 minutes for South San Francisco to get to the fire. (*Enterprise Journal, 1915*)

The repercussions from that disastrous fire led to the purchase of a 1916 Seagrave engine with an open cab (no windshield), a hard, flat bench seat, two red lights on either side, a bell, a push-button siren, and a very loud air horn just in case. With its solid rubber tires, steering was difficult at best. When residents saw the bright red engine racing toward them, seemingly out of control, everyone got out of the way! The engine was retired from service in 1966; a 20-year restoration project was completed in 1998.