

BOSTON'S OLDEST FIREMEN.

Six Men, Now on Active Duty, Who Have Served the City From Thirty-Seven to Forty-Five Years—They Have Had Thrilling Experiences at Many of Boston's Big Fires.



SIX OF BOSTON'S OLD FIREMEN.

Fighting fires must be regarded as a pretty healthy occupation, judging from six specimens who have served the city for from 37 to 45 years.

The six oldest men are the following, all of them being permanent members, assigned to regular fire duty, the same as men much younger:

Moses A. Jones, hoseman on combination wagon No. 2, South Boston—joined the department Aug 1, 1855. James B. Prescott, captain of engine company No. 30, West Roxbury—joined the department Dec 1, 1856. Erastus E. Jeffrey, engineman engine company No. 41, Allston—joined the department Nov 1, 1857. John H. Elliott, captain engine company No. 40, East Boston—joined the department Oct 1, 1859. William T. Cheswell, first assistant chief—joined the department April 1, 1863. J. H. Le Favor, captain engine company 24, Roxbury—joined the department June 1, 1863.

Engineman Jeffrey has been longer on the permanent list than any others of the force, having been appointed Jan 1, 1860, Capt Prescott being second, from June 1, 1860, and hoseman Jones third, the date of his certificate being Sept 17, 1860.

Four of the men have passed the age at which the law provides that they may be pensioned, 62, but it is rarely that a man cares to leave the service to which he has given the best part of his life so long as he is in good health and in the enjoyment of all his faculties, and commissioner Russell believes that a fireman should be allowed to remain on active duty as long as he is able and willing. That is why, for example, hoseman Moses A. Jones still helps to put out fires and is as anxious as ever to be first on the scene, although July 19 he will be 67 years old.

The records of all these old members is strikingly similar, so far as faithful application to duty and courageous readiness to do or die at all times are concerned. They have all been active participants in the many battles with fire which this city has seen, and they have all had a part in the development of the Boston department, taking part in its growth from primitive methods with hand tubs and buckets to one of the best of the fire fighting services of the world.

Exciting experiences have not been unusual, and they have done their part in saving life. Into their careers have been crowded for all these years the same whirl of excitement, the narrow escapes, the fights for existence and the devotion to duty that go to make up the lives of firemen in all large cities. One of them related a highly interesting experience to a reporter of The Globe, and it is likely that the others could tell more like it, but it answers to show some of the things men who have served as firemen for 37, 38 or 45 years have to go through occasionally. The one who told the story did not want his name mentioned. "I am too old to be a hero now," he remarked, "but I want some of these young fellows to know that we have done as much work and as good work as they are doing."

While not the oldest permanent member of the department, hoseman Moses A. Jones has probably seen more years of service than any of the others, and is entitled to rank as the first in point of service in the department today.

He first joined hand engine 1 Aug 1, 1855, when J. V. C. Smith was mayor and Elisha Smith chief of the department. In 1859 he was assigned to the first fire engine used in the department, No. 1, and remained there until Sept 17, 1860, when he was appointed on the permanent force and sent to engine No. 2, which was then located in the quarters on 4th st, where the combination wagon now is, and where Mr Jones still remains on duty.

In February, 1864, he enlisted in the army, and served for 22 months, being engaged for some time in Texas after the close of the war. Then he returned to the fire department, and took his old place with engine 2. May 10, 1882, the engine company was transferred and hose 12 put in the house, Mr Jones becoming attached to the latter piece of apparatus. May 9, 1893, the hose wagon gave place to the combination wagon, but Mr Jones was not changed, and he is there today.

He has been a fighting participant at all the big fires Boston has had since he joined the department. In the early days of the regular department, until the reorganization, it was customary for the South Boston apparatus to cover all Boston second alarms, and to go as far as East Boston on the third, while, in the days of the old hand tubs, the company took turns in sprinting every month to the city proper when a second was sounded. Mr Jones had a chance to work at all the big ones, therefore, and there has been so many that it can hardly be said that he remembers each one. He has served under Chiefs Elisha Smith, Bird, Danrell, Greene and Webber.

The old hoseman lives with his wife and one son at No. 252 Emerson st, and he is one of the glories of the South Boston small boy.

Engineman Erastus E. Jeffrey of engine 41 has been a member of the permanent force longer than any other Boston fireman. He was appointed Jan 1, 1860, but previous to that joined the call force and run with a "masheen." Mr Jeffrey was a machinist, and his career has been devoted to attending to the mechanical part of the apparatus, having been attached to this branch of the department since his appointment.

He was first made an assistant engineman, but Oct 1, 1873, was promoted to engineman and was attached to engine 23, in Fort Hill sq. He remained there until July 1, 1874, when he was appointed in the same capacity on engine 3. Nov 3, 1888, he was sent to engine 34 in Brighton, and Feb 10, 1893, was assigned to engine 41 in Allston, where he is now stationed.

Mr Jeffrey was located so long in the business section of the city proper that he was among the first to arrive

at all the big fires, but his station was with his engine and it devolved on him to keep his company's lines full. He has been slightly injured a number of times, and in 1866 was run over on State st.

He is hale and healthy today, however, and ready to stick to the department as long as his health is good and he is wanted. Mr Jeffrey is the father of three children, two of whom live with him and his wife at No. 13 Linden st, Allston.

Capt James B. Prescott boasts of longer service as a fireman than does engineman Jeffrey, but he did not become a member of the department force until five months later, on June 1, 1860. He joined the call force Dec 1, 1856, almost a year before the engineman, and served on ladder 3. When he became a permanent man he was made driver of this same apparatus.

At first the company was located at the corner of Brookline st and Harrison av; then it was removed to the corner of Malden st and Harrison av, and finally it went to the present quarters at the corner of Bristol st and Harrison av. He was promoted to the captaincy of ladder 3, May 2, 1871, and Sept 10, 1876, he was sent to West Roxbury to take charge of chemical 7. When the chemical was removed and engine 30 installed, he was given charge of the new company. This was on July 10, 1883, and he has since been located there.

Capt Prescott was a busy fireman in his day with the ladder company. He, too, has been a worker at all the large fires and he has been a witness of many thrilling scenes. He was present and worked at the Gerrish market fire, where the first steam fire engine ever used in Boston did effective work, and in 1856 he was one of the party which rescued a number from a North st lodging house, although 11 persons were killed, one of them being a fireman.

At the burning of a large paper warehouse on Federal st in the 60s he was at work near where firemen Tuttle and Cutting were thrown from a roof and buried in the ruins, and he directed the rescuing party to the spot where the men disappeared. The bodies were found where Capt Prescott said they would be, but life was extinct. He also did ladder duty on the Adelphi theater and the Winthrop buildings when those big structures were destroyed.

Capt Prescott was born in Newport, Me, Oct 8, 1836, and came to Boston in 1852. He lives at 1 Bellevue st, West Roxbury, with his wife and son. He is a member of Bloam lodge, No. 2, I. O. O. F.

Capt John H. Elliott was born in Weare, N. H., Sept 6, 1839. He is a healthy looking six-footer, and no one to look at him would think he was over three score years of age. He became a call man on ladder 2, East Boston, Oct 1, 1859, and June 1, 1877, was made call captain of the company.

When it was decided to replace all call officers by permanent ones, Capt Elliott determined to remain in the department, and he was made the permanent captain of the same ladder company. May 16, 1891, he was attached to engine company 40, the command of which he retains today. Capt Elliott has been slightly injured several times and has had the usual experience of seeing and working at all the big Boston fires since 1860. He lives at 21 Trenton st with his daughter and son. He is a Red Man.

William T. Cheswell, assistant chief of the department, is the youngest old man of the force. He was born in Boston, on Pleasant st, Jan 7, 1843, and joined engine company No. 7 as a call hoseman April 1, 1863. He was appointed driver of engine 4 from the call force June 1, 1864, and was made assistant engineman Jan 1, 1871. April 4, 1874, he was promoted to be engineman, and two days later was made captain, retaining his position on engine 4.

He was given the crossed trumpets of district chief July 1, 1880, and Feb 8, 1895, he was termed second assistant chief, becoming first assistant chief Nov 12, 1897. The term first assistant has since been abolished and he is now known as assistant chief of the department.

Mr Cheswell lives at No. 24 Chambers st with his wife and three children. He is a member of Joseph Warren lodge, F. and A. M., St Andrew's chapter, R. A. M., and Boston commandery, K. T. He has also taken all the degrees of the Scottish rite, having reached the 32d degree.

He also belongs to Franklin lodge, 23, I. O. O. F., the Boston veteran firemen's association and is president of the New England state veteran firemen's league. He is treasurer of the charitable association of the Boston fire department, the Barnicoot fire association and the Firemen's cemetery association, and he is trustee of funds of the Boston veteran firemen.

Capt J. H. Le Favor joined the call force of the fire department the latter part of 1861 on his return from a short-term enlistment in Co K, 6th Massachusetts, but remained at the business only a short time before starting off to the war again, enrolling himself with Co C of the 43d regiment. June 1, 1863, he again became a fireman, having served 100 days on his second enlistment.

He was attached to engine 30 and did service in that command all together for 30 years. Aug 4, 1873, he was appointed to the permanent force, and Nov 29, 1884, he was promoted to the captaincy of the company, remaining there until Feb 10, 1893, when he was transferred to engine 24, Roxbury, where he now is. Being connected with ladder 3, Capt Le Favor has, of course, seen as much active fire duty as falls to the lot of any man and he has had many thrilling escapes and much hard work.

He was run over 37 years ago and severely injured internally, and at the Winthrop building fire he was knocked off a ladder and badly injured. Several times he has been slightly hurt, but his stalwart form today gives little indication of any permanent difficulty. He is a member of post 7, G. A. R., and the Boston veteran firemen's association. He resides at 23 Morse st, Dorchester, with one daughter and two sons.

Chief Webber is also one of the oldest firemen of Boston, but he is not included in the list, as he first became a member of the Roxbury department. Superintendent Hawkins of the repair

shop has also had a career covering more than 40 years, but he cannot be said to be engaged in active fire duty today.

In Charlestown there are a number of call men who have served for more than twoscore years, but they have never been connected with the department, and depend principally on other labor. The list given includes the six men who have served the most consecutive years in the Boston department, and who are in active duty today.