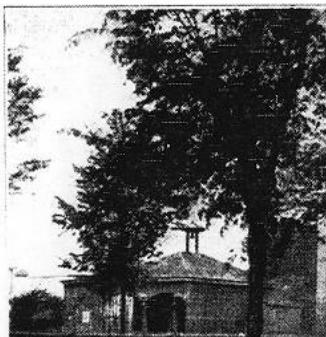

Warren County Historical Tidbits: Plummer Hook & Ladder Company

A Bell, Buckets and Ladders in the Hands of Generations of Brave Men

You know, it seems like every week when I launch into researching these Historical Tidbits for you, I hear Al Fleming's great quote in my head..."In Warren County, we **live** in the originals." And it seems that we also have a lot of "other" originals in and about our communities that remind us of our rich history. That thought opens our story this week...the story of Warrenton's Historic "Plummer Hook & Ladder Company"...a local, statewide, and even arguably a national treasure.



*Plummer Hook & Ladder Co.
1880's - note the bell on roof*

Now, to begin with, The Plummer Hook & Ladder Company was not only the **longest existing** African American Fire Company founded in North Carolina, but it was also the **first** Fire Company founded in Warren County. And how very appropriate that a group of 12 men came together in 1868 to form this company of volunteers. See, if you read through any history of the 19th century, it seems like fire is just an accepted part of everyday life...educator John Graham lost at least one house and one school to fire...the Mordecai School burned...Warrenton had two downtown fires in the late 1800's that decimated a number of businesses. Even in doing my own genealogy research I found that great-grandparents on both Mother's and Daddy's side of the family lost no fewer than 3 homes/stores each to fire.



1885 Plummer Hook & Ladder Site on Market

So, just after the end of the Civil War John S. Plummer gathered a group of prominent African American land owners and businessmen together in order to provide protection from fire for their homes & businesses and those of other residents of Warrenton. With the exception of the Old Brick Store built in 1835 at Main & Market, the Courthouse & the Eaton Place, virtually every other structure in town was wood frame construction. In tribute to Warrenton's pioneers, Mikel Legeros of Raleigh notes on his website, "To be a Plummer is to be a fireman. From the day of its inception the Warrenton Fire Department has always had a Plummer on its roles. John S. Plummer, the first chief of Warrenton, served for 25 years as president of the state organization. Baker Plummer who was born in 1881 served for 67 years as a fireman..."

The original 1868 Charter laid out their mission as "more united action in the extinguishment of Fire in the town of Warrenton." There was just one drawback...neither the town nor the state provided any money for this "united action." So these 12 men improvised...oil cans were free, so those became their "buckets" for a brigade...ladders were personally owned...to sound the alarm at first these volunteers would simply shout "Fire" as loud as possible towards their neighbor who passed along the alarm, then later added a bell on a wooden stand next to the courthouse...and since the town had no water supply, they depended on two community wells on the courthouse grounds.



Original Ransom Bucket Wagon currently in the NC Museum of History, Raleigh. Note the ladders and hooks (firemen's pikes) on top & the oil cans to carry water to fight the fires.

Our "originals" – the original tools & treasures of this Fire Department – can still be found right here in Warrenton and Raleigh. Company member, Jimmie Ransom & his brother gave the Company speed when they built the first wagon to carry the ladders, hooks and buckets to the fires. Accounts note that this wagon was a huge help to the firemen in carrying equipment even though for some years no horse was available so the members pulled the wagon with sheer manpower. You can see this original wagon currently at the NC Museum of History in Raleigh, donated by the Town of Warrenton in 1976 along with other artifacts.

The reminders of these volunteers' bravery and dedication are also spread throughout Warrenton, in plain view. Ever notice the bell in front of the Courthouse? That's *the* original bell that stood between the Company HQ on Market Street and the Courthouse & pictured above...still holding a place of honor on the Square. If you'd like to see some original helmets, classic pictures and logs from the Plummer Hook & Ladder Company, stop by the Armory...two display cases hold these treasures until a permanent home can be built for them. And finally, stop by the Company's final home, in the "old" (soon to be the new again) Town Hall at Market & Bragg. The Museum is in the works, but you can peer through the garage door windows and see the Company's second fire truck, a 1938 Ford engine. It is my personal hope that as the renovations begin on the Town Hall it re-lights the spark to open the permanent Museum so that all of us can see the story of the brave, dedicated men of the Plummer Hook & Ladder Company.

Like to help the Plummer Hook & Ladder Historical Society & the Museum tell this unique story? You can reach them at 252-257-4859 or via mail at P.O. Box 281 Warrenton NC 27589.

Wherever you turn in Warren County we have a jewel...

"Warren County Historical Tidbits" is a project of The Chamber of Commerce of Warren County.