



FIRE UP ABOUT RESTORATION



Discussing Horse Drawn Fire Vehicle Restoration
with Weaver Wagons' Emery Weaver

Photos provided by Weaver Wagons

NUTS AND BOLTS

1893 Hose Wagon

built by The Michigan Fire Ladder and Engine Company
of Grand Rapids, Michigan

Situated in Wayne County, Ohio is Weaver Wagons & Custom Design. Like many businesses it has evolved over the years, first being known as Weaver Farm Wagons under the guidance of Ervin Weaver. Ervin had a strong relationship with Pioneer Equipment, selling Weaver wagon bodies on Pioneer undercarriages. Eventually the business expanded to include hitch wagons, parade and trail wagons, farm wagons and people haulers. In 2014 Ervin offered the business to his sons, Vernon and Emery, and they reflected the ownership change by rebranding as Weaver Wagons & Custom Design.

Vernon worked first at Pioneer Equipment for 15 years before coming into the family business. His experience as a master metal machinist is key to his work on manufacturing fifth-wheel gears and wagon parts. Emery grew up working on wagons, he was ten years old when his dad started the wagon business. Today he oversees the wood and paint departments as well as final assembly. Emery is also on the front lines, handling the marketing, sales and business sides of Weaver Wagons. In 2020 the company bought World Class Carriages, expanding their wagon business to include modern marathon and presentation vehicles.

Restoration Services

Regardless of how well a horse-drawn vehicle is built they will eventually show signs of use. Weaver has established a reputation of completing restoration projects, which notoriously takes a long time to complete, in a timely manner. While they will work on any type of vehicle, for the purposes of this article we will be focusing on their work with fire vehicles.

Tom Doyle, owner of the Little Wiz Fire Museum in Medina, Ohio, asked them to take on the restoration of a horse-drawn aerial ladder wagon used in the 1900s. It was in a challenging condition. "We first had to envision how the aerial ladder looked when it was new," Emery said, "we replaced all the wood including the aerial ladder."

Fortunately quite a bit is known about aerial ladders as fires in multi-story buildings were common (and deadly) in the mid-1800s. Many designers tried and failed to develop a stable ladder vehicle. Success came in 1868 when Daniel Hayes developed a vehicle with an aerial ladder that could be extended quickly to as much as 85 feet in height. That first vehicle sold in 1869 for \$3,000. As local governments were often funding the purchase of these vehicles, documentation is often buried in meeting notes and/or newspaper reports of the purchase. Fire equipment typically does not have a maker's plate, in fact it is hard on deteriorated vehicles to even properly identify which fire department owned them. Sometimes researchers get very lucky; Tom Doyle was able to find original pictures of his hose wagon (right). Weaver does not do deep research on individual vehicles but they do discuss

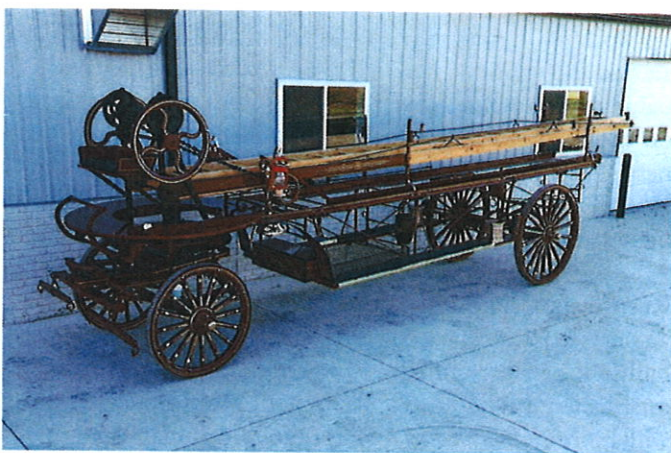
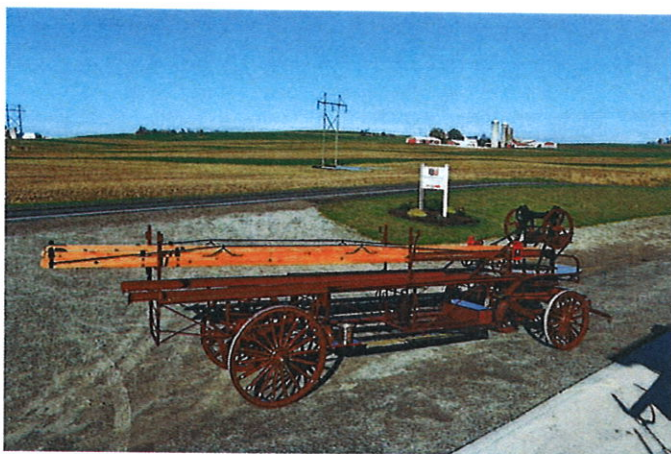


Above: Hose wagon restored for the Little Wiz Fire Museum. All the wood needed to be replaced. Wayne Troyer put the finishing touches on it with gold leaf and pinstriping. The entire restoration process took about a year and a half, much of which was spent on painting.

NUTS AND BOLTS

"This aerial ladder wagon was our first fire equipment restoration piece. It was restored for Tom Doyle from the Little Wiz Fire Museum in Medina, Ohio. When restoring a wagon like this we take everything apart and sandblast all the metal pieces. For this wagon we replaced all the wood including the aerial ladder. That was a big project in itself."

-Emery Weaver



with the owners the history of the vehicle, preservation/restoration goals, and future uses of the vehicles.

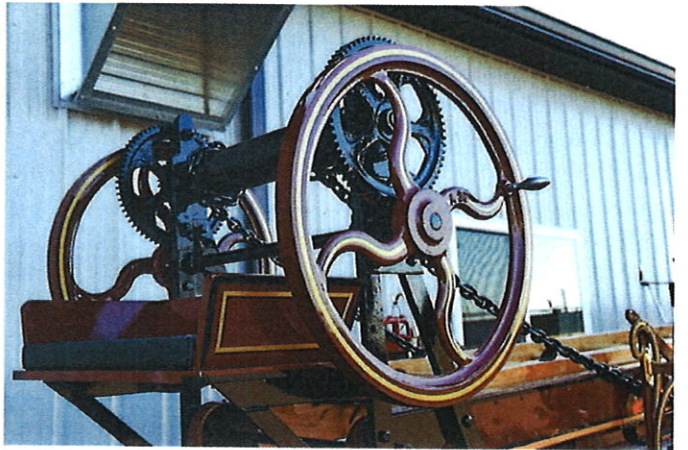
Emery notes, "Most fire departments took good care of their equipment. Weather decay is the primary issue, the vehicles simply rot from sitting outside." Fire vehicles face the same wood and metal decay as a Break or Meadowbrook from sitting outside, most damage is not job related as fire equipment was immediately cared for after a fire. While the vehicles were cared for, conservation was not a priority. As

Right: This hose wagon was restored for Edward Hawthorne, president of the Texas Fire Museum in Dallas, Texas. Due to the condition of the wagon, Weaver needed to do a lot of research on how some things really should be. All four wheels were rebuilt, primed and painted. A unique thing about this wagon is that it has a seventh spring in the back. Real patent leather was used for the fenders. All the brass pieces were polished, and Wayne Troyer finished it with gold leaf and pinstripping.

Barb Foley of the Copper Harbor Country Store (Copper Harbor, Michigan) donated the wagon to the Texas Fire Museum. Built in the early 1900s, the hose wagon is believed to have originally served Ahmeek, Michigan, a small village located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The vehicle still sees a lot of action today. On November 22nd it was parked outside the historic Fort Worth Fire Station No. 1 in downtown Fort Worth, Texas as part of a show of appreciation to the fire fighters at the station. While only recently restored the vehicle has moved from Michigan to Ohio to Texas and now is scheduled to appear at a variety of fire fighter events and conferences.

Left: Fire Team and Wagon No. 1, Atlantic, Iowa, circa. 1909 Library of Congress. Black and white images like this are often the only visual evidence of what working horse-drawn fire vehicles looked like. More detailed records can sometimes be found in town records, as towns often voted on the purchase and restoration of fire vehicles. Finding those records is often an exercise in patience.



Ahmeck Hose Wagon

NUTS AND BOLTS

the original paint suffered wear, departments simply added another coat of paint. As they did not sand down the original coat it is still sometimes possible to find a gold leafed fire department number on the side, which is always a thrill to find.

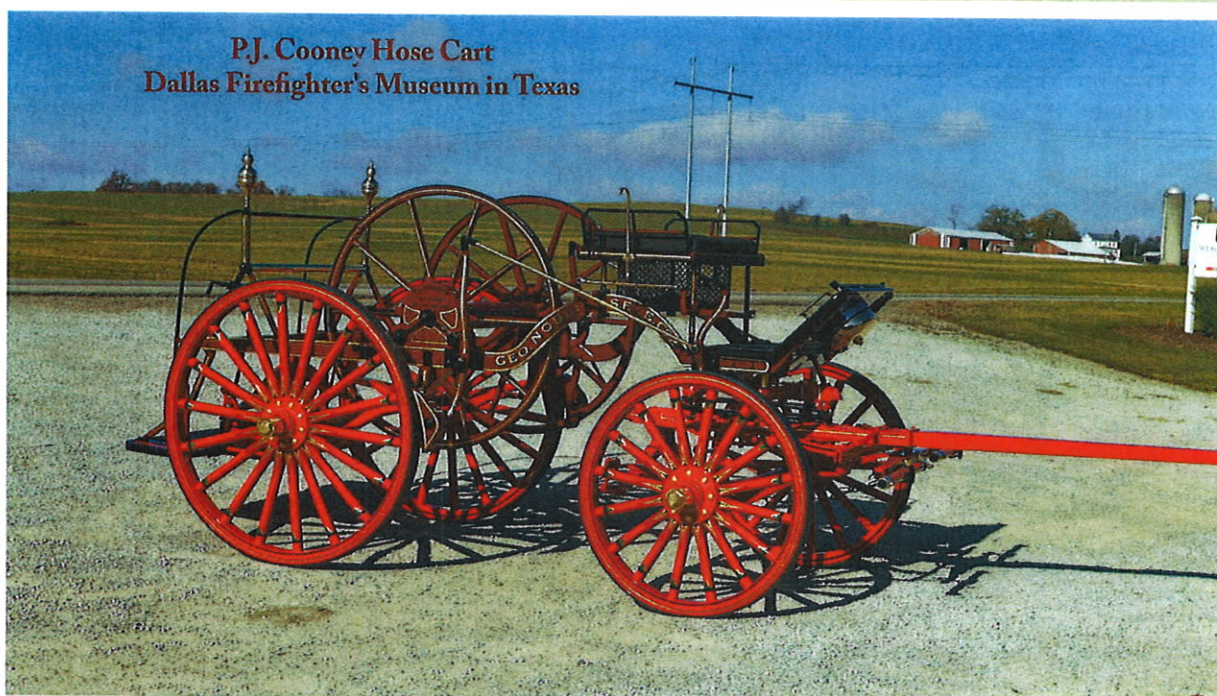
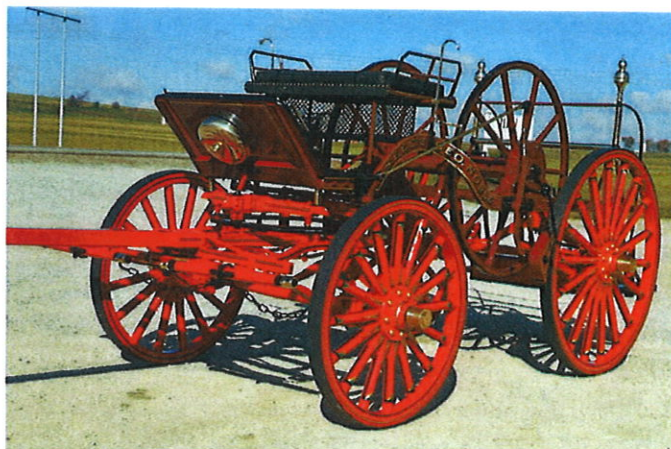
Weaver goes through 14 steps for most of their restorations which includes prepping, sanding, and priming multiple times. The paint coat must be very smooth to allow for striping and gold leafing. In the early days they rolled wagons out of the shop on sunny days to paint, today they have expanded into a large shop area which allows indoor painting with proper ventilation. Workers start on a vehicle corner, carefully sanding down layers to determine how many layers of paint are actually on the vehicle. Most working fire vehicles are painted red, maroon or orange/red. White and other colors are occasionally found.

Firefighters tend to be very proud of their department and equipment. One way they could express that was in having vibrant vehicles, thus restored fire vehicles tend to be highly decorative. Weaver Wagons works with Wayne Troyer for the gold leafing and striping. His name may be familiar as his work has been featured in *The Carriage Journal* several times. Troyer doesn't just add striping, he adds the finishing touch to the vehicles with gilded gold, black and ivory trim paint, taking the vehicle to the next level.

Weaver Wagons is located 20 minutes from Mt. Hope, Ohio (where there is a twice yearly carriage sale) in Dalton, Ohio. They invite you to stop by to see their current restoration projects. ~



There was a lot of work in getting the wheels on this P.J. Cooney hose cart freed from the axle as the hub was welded to the axle and the steel pipe was welded to the hub. The hubs were saved, the wheels were rebuilt and new brass hub caps made.



P.J. Cooney Hose Cart
Dallas Firefighter's Museum in Texas