Great Moments: Book to Capture Department's History

Fire captain Ron Broussard has spent the past year researching a centennial book on the Lafayette Fire Department. The finished volume, which is scheduled for printing in July, will be available only as a special edition, so orders for the book need to be made early.

The book will be the only comprehensive history of the Lafayette Fire Department. At 208 pages, it will include not only articles and anecdotal material, but also a breakdown of the department's advances in staffing, equipment and techniques.

It will also feature both full color and black and white photography illustrating the department's development since 1897.

Copies of the book may be ordered for $60.17, which includes tax, by writing to:

Photo-Graphics
202 Cottonwood
Lafayette, LA 70506
Lafayette's first firefighters were volunteers who called themselves the Hobos. They fought fires with buckets, shovels and whatever else they might have found on hand. Even after Lafayette's city fire department was established in 1908, the Hobos continued to serve, working alongside the "official" firefighters.

EARLY HEROES:
HOW THE HOBOS GOT THEIR NAME

Back in the late 1800's, the budding village of Lafayette received its sole fire protection from a group of dedicated, unpaid volunteers who called themselves the Hobos. They practiced their craft in bucket-brigade style, responding to fire emergencies whenever and wherever they were needed.

No one questions the dedication of these early volunteers, but there are a couple of stories as to how they came to be called the Hobos. One story holds that because most of the volunteers were blue-collar working men, they would show up at fires dressed in dirty and sometimes ragged work clothes - looking, basically, like a bunch of hobos.

The other story claims that the name was first applied by the new wife of Lafayette's first fire chief. He got married rather suddenly, without telling any of his fellow volunteers about the impending nuptials. When the firefighters heard the news, they showed up at the chief's house, ready for an impromptu wedding reception. The missus was less than pleased, and was quoted thusly:

"Get out of here, you bunch of hobos."

In either case, the name stuck to those early volunteers, and the volunteers stuck to the task of making Lafayette a safer place to live and work. Second and third-generation Hobos are still around, we're told, still proudly carrying on the tradition of volunteerism which began with their fathers and grandfathers.