

**1857 JEFFERS HANDTUB – “Colonel DeWitt”  
HAND DRAWN SIDE-STROKE PUMPER  
9-INCH CYLINDER with 5 ½ INCH STROKE**

This pumper was the first fire engine purchased by the Town of Oxford shortly after the fire department was organized in November of 1856.

It was manufactured by William Jeffers Co. of Pawtucket, Rhode Island and was delivered via the Norwich & Worcester Railroad in early 1857. The handtub was purchased for the sum of \$1,037.12, and an additional hose cart and 300 feet of hose was procured at a cost of \$558.80. Shipping charges from the Jeffers Co. totaled \$7.50.

This pumper was named after Colonel Alexander DeWitt, a prominent Oxford citizen, businessman, and statesman of the day. In 1858, Colonel DeWitt donated a parcel of the family estate located near Main and Barton Streets for the construction of the town's first fire station to house the new handtub. (This station, known as “Col. DeWitt Hall” is no longer standing, but was located on Barton Street, just west of the former OFD HQ.) As a show of gratitude, the engine company took the name of “DeWitt Engine Company No.1”.

The handtub was typically pumped by 10-20 men at a time. A typical training drill involved shooting a water stream over the Universalist Church spire, which was 90 feet high. At the Worcester Fire Department Muster on September 4, 1857, the Col. DeWitt placed 24<sup>th</sup> out of 60 contestants, shooting a stream 142 feet high.

The Colonel DeWitt proudly served the OFD until 1918 when it was replaced by Oxford's first motorized fire engine, purchased from Jackson Ford in Oxford.

In 1948, the handtub was donated to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) in Boston. A “thank you” letter dated July 9, 1948 was sent to Fire Chief Woodman to thank him for the gift, and a copy of this letter remains in our files.

The whereabouts of the Colonel after 1948 remain somewhat of a mystery, however in the late 1980's a family living on Cape Cod sent a letter to Chief Ralph Miller. It seems that the Colonel had been discovered in a barn on the Cape among a collection of antique fire engines. The letter stated that a member of the family had intended to open his own museum, but had recently passed away. As a result of this, the collection was disbanded and the family decided to offer pieces to the original owners. At the urging of the Chief and other like-minded members of the fire department, Article 26 was placed on the Spring 1989 town meeting warrant which sought \$3,500.00 for the purchase and transportation of the Colonel back to town. This article was passed unanimously and the Colonel returned home shortly thereafter. Interestingly, the town report from 1989 indicated that the handtub was purchased from SPNEA, and not a private collector.

In 1998 the Colonel was restored to its original splendor by Mr. J. Donald Lennerton, Jr. of Leicester, MA. Everything you see on the Colonel is original with the exception of the new wooden cover on the rear of the tub. You will note the two lanterns bearing the name “Colonel DeWitt” on the front of the handtub. Interestingly these lanterns had become separated from the Colonel at some point in time, but had been discovered in a Connecticut flea market in the 1970's by Captain Olney of the fire department. The Captain purchased these lanterns not realizing that they would be reunited with the Colonel a decade later.

The Colonel is a true historical treasure for the people of the Town of Oxford and the Oxford Fire Department itself. It is rare that an engine of this type and vintage would survive to this day, much less be reunited with the fire department in which it originally served.