

**1884 SILSBY HORSE DRAWN STEAM ENGINE – “Huguenot 1”**  
**SERIAL NUMBER 767 – 5<sup>th</sup> SIZE**  
**NO. 5 HOLLY ROTARY PUMP (500 GPM)**  
**MODEL TYPE 9**  
**GROSS WEIGHT 4800 LBS**

This steam engine was the second fire engine purchased by the Town of Oxford as a result of the growth and expansion of mill industry in North Oxford, and the associate need to provide improved fire protection for its residents and industry.

It was built by the Silsby Manufacturing Company of Seneca Falls, NY and was delivered on or about April 1884 via the Boston & Albany Railroad. The steamer was purchased for the sum of \$3,320.30, plus \$29.70 freight for total cost \$3,350.00. Additionally, a hose wagon (built by Smallridge and Bourget of Worcester) was purchased at a cost of \$225.00.

This model of steam engine was selected by a town appointed purchasing committee that conferred with the fire chiefs of Boston and Worcester (and other towns having steam apparatus) on the type of steam fire engines “best adapted to the wants of a country town”.

Silsby steam fire engines were of a unique design, utilizing a rotary pump as opposed to the piston or reciprocating type pumps used by other manufacturers. A Silsby employee, Mr. Birdsall Holly, patented the rotary design. By the mid 1800’s, the Holly Rotary Pump was widely acknowledged by experts to be the best fire pump in the world. It was said “that the machine stood perfectly still, even when doing the heaviest fire duty, such that a glass of water could be placed on one of the wheels and not a drop be spilled”.

Also in 1884, during the April town meeting, Article 19 on the town warrant sought funds to build a new station to house the steam fire engine. Construction began shortly thereafter on the building in which you are now standing. In 1885, Article 17 was approved which sought additional funds “to complete the fire engine house with a hall in the second story of same”.

In 1888, the “Huguenot Steamer No. 1 Company” was officially formed to operate the Steamer. This name was taken in honor of the French Huguenots who played a major role in establishing the settlements that later became the Town of Oxford. In addition to the fire engine, hose cart, hose, harnesses, coats and other equipment, the Company listed among its property “1 table – a gift of the Company to the Town”. This table still occupies space in the small room adjacent to the truck bays.

The Huguenot Steamer proudly served the OFD until 1923 when it was replaced by a motorized fire engine. By many accounts, the Steamer remained tucked away in the rear of this truck bay for many years. Sometime in 1941 the Steamer disappeared from town under unknown circumstances, but eventually became part of a private collection owned by Mr. Franklin Reed. Mr. Reed graciously donated approximately 60 pieces of antique fire apparatus to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) prior to his death in 1996. Subsequently, SPNEA loaned the Huguenot Steamer to the New England Fire and History Museum located in Brewster, MA. The Steamer served as the centerpiece of that collection until 2000 when the founder and president, Mr. Eugene Morris, passed away and the decision was made to close the museum.

Working with SPNEA, the OFD and Oxford Firefighters Association initiated a campaign to repurchase the Huguenot Steamer and return it for safekeeping and display in its original fire station. At the 2001 special town meeting, residents of Oxford approved Article 11 to authorize the expenditure of \$52,000.00, the appraised value of the apparatus. On March 5,

2002 a contingent from the Oxford Fire Department and Oxford Firefighters Association traveled to the Brewster museum to secure the Steamer and carefully transport it back to town. Upon arrival, the group was met by other members of the Oxford Fire Department, and a parade of all department vehicles escorted the Steamer through town with an interim stop at the Huguenot Steamer No. 1 fire station. In July of 2006, the Steamer finally "returned to quarters" after an absence of over six and a half decades.

There were about 5,000 steam fire engines produced in America, but unfortunately most were scrapped during WW II. Today, only about 400 remain, 15 of which have been documented in Massachusetts. The Huguenot Steamer is one of only 40 of the Silsby Model Type 9 that remain in existence today.