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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1

other names/site number Old Betsy; Fire Engine No. 1

2. Location

street & number 100 S. Ocean Boulevard n/a  not for publication

city or town Boca Raton n/a  vicinity

state Florida code FL county Palm Beach code 099 zip code 33432

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Janet Snyder Matthews 9/11/2001  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida State Historic Preservation Office, Division of Historical Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Entered in the  
National Register

11.1.01

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

**Name of related multiple property listings**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

n/a

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Government: Fire engine

Other: Fire fighting and suppression

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Education: Public safety

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: 1925 LaFrance fire engine

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation n/a

walls \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

roof \_\_\_\_\_

other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1926-1968

Significant Dates

1926

Significant Person

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

American-LaFrance

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of Repository

#

Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1  
Name of Property

Palm Beach Co., FL  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** less than 1 acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	5 9 2 7 6 0	2 9 1 4 5 9 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Joseph W. McManus, Zoning Consultant & Barbara E. Mattick, Deputy SHPO for Survey & Registration

organization Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation date August 2001

street & number 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (850) 245-6333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Boca Raton, Leif J. Ahnell, City Manager

street & number 201 West Palmetto Park Road telephone (561) 393-7700

city or town Boca Raton state Florida zip code 33432

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1 **BOCA RATON FIRE ENGINE NO. 1**  
Narrative Description **Boca Raton, Palm Beach Co, FL**

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**SUMMARY**

Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1 —“Old Betsy”<sup>1</sup>—is an American LaFrance Type 75 Triple Combination manufactured in Elmira, New York, in 1925.<sup>2</sup> Fire Engine No. 1 is 20 ‘ 1” long, 6’ 2 ½ “ wide and is 9’ 1” high (to the top of the bell). The apparatus has a wheelbase of 156 ½” and weighs (less hose, men, fuel and circulating water) 9,050 lbs. The engine is six cylinder double with a 5 ½” bore x 6” stroke, displacing 885 cubic inches, and developing 105 brake horsepower at 1,186 r.p.m. It is fired by dual Westinghouse distributors and an Eisenmann magneto ignition. The rotary gear pump displaces 1.29 gallons per revolution, 750 gallons per minute at 120 p.s.i. net pump pressure, fed by two 4 ½” suction inlets into three 2 ½” discharges. The apparatus is also equipped with a chemical system, hose carrier, hard suction hose, and hand lanterns on the rear post<sup>3</sup>

**SETTING**

Old City Hall, now known as the Townhall, and Old Betsy were closely associated for most of their histories. The fire engine, upon arrival in 1926, was initially housed in Fire Chief Guy Bender’s garage. Upon completion of the City Hall in 1927,<sup>4</sup> the apparatus was moved to the fire house—the south bay of City Hall—where it remained for almost forty years; the fire chief had an apartment on the second floor. In 1964, most City departments were moved from the old City Hall west to the new City Hall on Palmetto Park Road. Old Betsy was transferred to Fire Station No. 1 on Glades Road. The City then leased old City Hall to the Boca Raton Historical Society<sup>5</sup>. The Historical Society restored the building and in November, 1984 opened Townhall as a community center, museum and historical archive.<sup>6</sup> The firehall had been converted to a gift shop where tasteful mementos were sold and Old Betsy was displayed, on loan from the Fire Department. Passers-by could see her through the glass doors facing Federal Highway. Following the 1991-1993 restoration, the antique apparatus was found to be incompatible with the gift shop, and was transferred to Fire Station No. 3, a modern, active fire station located at 100 S. Ocean Boulevard. This location satisfactorily accommodates the fire engine’s need for mobility to fulfill its ambassadorial function and the Fire-Rescue Department’s need to maintain the apparatus. It also provides an authentic firehouse setting for the historic fire engine.

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<sup>1</sup> “‘I’ve been here twenty years, and we just always called it Old Betsy,’ says Assistant Chief Lewis Papitto.” Jim Rogers, “‘Old Betsy’ Battled Boca’s First Blazes,” Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel, 2 July 1978: 4B

<sup>2</sup> Manufacturer’s literature from American LaFrance

<sup>3</sup> Manufacturer’s literature from American LaFrance.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from the mayor to Guy Bender, dated 27 July, 1928. Spanish River Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Donald W. Curl and John P. Johnson, Boca Raton. A Pictorial History, Donning Co. Publishers, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Old City Hall, now Town Hall, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 18, 1980.

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Narrative Description **Boca Raton, Palm Beach Co, FL**

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**DESCRIPTION AND ALTERATIONS/RESTORATION**

In its time, Old Betsy represented the state-of-the-art in fire fighting equipment. This fire engine is especially distinctive because it was designed without doors, windows or top; because of its right-hand steering, the position of the gearshift and emergency brake levers to the driver's right, mounted outside the frame, and because of the archaic chain-drive transmission. The dual ignition system is remarkable: the magneto system fires one spark plug in each of the cylinders and the distributor system, using battery power, fires a second spark plug in each cylinder, allowing the apparatus to be started by either (or both) systems, thereby assuring response in the event of fires. A hand crank, mounted on the front of the engine is an alternative to the dual ignition system. A searchlight, mounted in a swivel in the middle of the dashboard, was operated by the firefighter sitting to the left of the driver. Sometime after delivery, a red light-and-siren combination was added on the left front fender as a safety measure.<sup>7</sup> Old Betsy is remarkable, too, as one of the few survivors of the 61 Type 75's American LaFrance sold in the southeastern United States in 1925.<sup>8</sup>

Upon its arrival, the City purchased over 1,500' of 2 ½" cotton fire hose, a reel and sulfuric acid for the foam tank<sup>9</sup> The firemen also installed a booster reel and another 150' of hose. The bell had to be relocated to the front of the engine from its original position; otherwise the fire engine could not be driven under the doorway at (old) City Hall. The apparatus also carried one 12' ladder and one 24' extension ladder. Ultimately, the chemical system was discarded and replaced by containers holding 150 gallons of water.

Old Betsy survives today through the devoted care of the firefighters and because of the continuing support provided by a succession of seven fire chiefs. Guy Bender was appointed chief of the Fire Department volunteers in 1925, prior to Old Betsy's arrival; Chief Harry Purdom left in 1946. Chief John Loughery then became the first full-time paid firefighter and had Old Betsy painted white, supposedly to match his hair.<sup>10</sup> In the 1950's-1960's, there were few mechanics who were willing and able to work on the fire engine. Ray Larabee, a retired fire chief from West Palm Beach, with the knowledge and interest in old fire trucks, would come down and spend several days at a time to repair and perform maintenance on the now-vintage engine.<sup>11</sup> In the early 1960's, Fireman Joe DeMassa repainted the fire engine red with gold lettering.<sup>12</sup> Chief Daniel Andrews was appointed in 1965; the Fire Department was gradually changing from dependence on part-time volunteers to reliance on a full-time paid professional staff to keep up with the growth of Boca Raton. When Old Betsy was retired from service in 1968, the Fire Department considered selling or even giving her away, but the firemen decided to keep her and dreamed of restoring her. Fireman Louis Pepitto (later assistant chief) and Darrold Hurlbert commenced to work on restoring the fire engine. The tires and rims were getting bad; the tires had never been removed because of fear for the wooden rims. Hurlbert found rims in Pennsylvania and tires in

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<sup>7</sup> Letter to the Boca Raton Historical Society from Nelson Bolan, member, Society of Automotive Historians, 11 January 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Manufacturer's literature from American LaFrance.

<sup>9</sup> Original invoices to the City, from the Boca Raton Historical Society archives. 1926-28

<sup>10</sup> Louis Fryzel, "Boca Raton Firefighters," *Fiesta*, Vol.1, No. 3, July, 1970: 13-15

<sup>11</sup> Jackie Mabesa interview with Darrold Hurlbert, retired Commander, Boca Raton Fire Department, 30 July, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Rogers, *Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel*, 2 July 1978. 4B

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Germany. They painted Old Betsy white in early 1970, preparatory for the Bicentennial and her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>13</sup> She was repainted red again after 1981.

Chief Andrews retired in 1976 and was succeeded by Chief John Withrow, who determined that Old Betsy had to be completely overhauled and repaired in order to keep her functioning. Charlie Heweker of Fire Apparatus Repair in Homestead won the contract and started work in March 1991. In August 1992, Hurricane Andrew not only destroyed the structure housing Old Betsy in Homestead but also severely impacted the Heweker family. A Fire Department team<sup>14</sup> undertook the work in cooperation with Heweker at his home in west Homestead. The firemen restored Old Betsy to her original appearance using a photograph taken by American LaFrance in 1925 at their factory in New York. The bell was re-mounted on the center post and the red light-and -siren combination was removed from the left front fender. They completed the work in November 1993. Following Chief Withrow's retirement, Kerry Koen was appointed as chief. Chief Koen retired in March 1998, and Bruce Silk, the current fire chief was appointed.

Fire Engine No. 1, now 76 years old, is in original factory condition except for the replacement of rims, tires and replacement parts (see Parts Replacement Program). Old Betsy can be seen at Fire Station No. 3, an active fire station located at 100 S. Ocean Boulevard, in the Boca Raton beach section, by calling Boca Raton Fire-Rescue Services for an appointment.

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<sup>13</sup> Jackie Mabesa interview with Darrold Hurlbert (above)

<sup>14</sup> The Fire Department team consisted of then-Deputy Chief Bruce Silk, Mechanic Tom Sova, Lieutenant Craig Bond and Firefighter James Ehrhardt.

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**PARTS REPLACEMENT PROGRAM: 1991-1993**

Old Betsy was restored as close as possible to her original condition and appearance using the photograph American LaFrance had taken when she was manufactured in 1925. Original equipment replacement parts were purchased from sources that deal in antique fire apparatus parts.

<b>Part</b>	<b>Description and Comments</b>
Electrical wiring	All wiring was replaced with cloth covered wiring that matches the design, style and color of the original wiring. The wiring was replaced not only for appearance, but also for safety by greatly reducing the possibility of an electrical short. A custom made battery provides 6 volts for the lighting system and 12 volts for the starter.
Fire hoses and ladders	The oldest serviceable cotton hose was installed, 1926-era American LaFrance ladders were installed
Fuel tank, chemical tank and generator	The chemical tank replaced the water tank added locally in 1926. Other parts were replaced with original parts purchased from antique apparatus parts dealers. The original starter and this replacement generator were re-wired from 6 to 12 volts.
Plugs, points and belts	Replaced periodically since 1926 as the need arose
Running board fabric	Replaced to replicate the material covering the original running boards
Seat upholstery	Replaced to match the appearance of the original upholstery
Steering wheel	Hand-made wood replica of the original steering wheel (no original 1925 steering wheel was available for purchase). Source: Tom Sova, Equipment Specialist, B.R. Fire-Rescue Services



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**Boca Raton, Palm Beach Co., FL**

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**SUMMARY**

Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1-- "Old Betsy"-- is an American LaFrance Type 75 Triple Combination manufactured in Elmira, New York, in 1925. It is housed at Fire Station No. 3, 100 S. Ocean Boulevard, Boca Raton, Florida. The fire engine is eligible for listing in the National Register for local significance under **Criterion A** in the area of **Politics/Government** as an important aspect of the history of the municipal government of Boca Raton. Old Betsy is closely associated with the founding of Boca Raton, which at that time had a population of fewer than 500 people. Its purchase was one of the earliest and most significant investments made by the first Town Council. From its arrival in 1926 until 1946, it was the City's only fire-fighting apparatus; from 1946 until 1960 it provided 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> fire response, and until its retirement from active service in 1968, it provided 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> fire response-- an active fire-fighting career of 42 years. During her active career, Old Betsy was stationed in City Hall (NR 1980). Still owned by the City and housed in a real fire station, Old Betsy has been a mobile "Good Will Ambassador" for the past 33 years. As a resource that was intended to be mobile and that is housed in an appropriate setting, it meets **Criteria Consideration B** for moved properties. Because the active career of the fire engine extended to 1968, it meets **Criteria Consideration G** for properties whose significance extends into the period less than fifty years ago.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT – Boca Raton**

On April 15, 1925, architect Addison Mizner announced that he and a group of Palm Beach, Florida associates had formed the Mizner Development Corporation to build "the world's most architecturally beautiful playground" at Boca Raton, a small agricultural community that had been founded in the early 1900s. The company had acquired sixteen thousand acres of land. His plans were made at the height of the Florida Land Boom (ca. 1924-1926), a time of frenzied land development, particularly in South Florida. Mizner's vision of the development quickly captured national attention. His plans called for a complete, modern, resort city. The Town of Boca Raton was incorporated in May 1925. As in most 1920s land promotions, the Mizner Development Corporation constructed a large oceanfront hotel, the Ritz-Carlton Cloister Inn, which opened in 1926. Residential areas included affluent neighborhoods, such as Distrito de Boca Raton, and more modest areas, such as Old Floresta.<sup>1</sup>

The Florida Boom collapsed in 1926, and the Mizner Development Corporation went into bankruptcy in 1927. In the late 1920s, however, the Mizner Development Corporation's holdings in Boca Raton were sold to various businessmen, who continued to develop the area as a seasonal resort for the wealthy. The town's permanent population consisted of only five hundred people in 1940, though thousands of seasonal residents came each winter. During World War II, the construction of a large army training base nearby enhanced the local economy and expanded the town's population. Large-scale real estate development after the war changed

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Curl, Clayton Ludeman, and Tulie W. Taylor, Fred C. Aiken House, National Register Nomination, 1992.

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Boca Raton from a small resort town for the wealthy to a sprawling urban area. The current population approaches 75,000.<sup>2</sup>

**HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

On April 20, 1926, studies were temporarily interrupted at Boca Raton Elementary School while children rushed from their desks to watch, in wonder, as the gleaming red fire truck with its gold leaf lettering "Boca Raton" on the hood and shiny brass bell was unloaded from the Florida East Coast Railway flatbed car at the side track across the street. One of the students, Pauline Raulerson Aylward, remembered the excitement of that day.<sup>3</sup> Like many of her classmates, she would soon have ties to the engine that fathers, uncles, and older brothers would drive, as they became the town's first volunteer fire fighters.

Despite the fact that Boca Raton was a town of fewer than 500 individuals of modest means, the acquisition of this fire engine was one of the earliest and most significant investments the town made following its incorporation.<sup>4</sup> Fire Engine No. 1, "Old Betsy" as the fire truck is affectionately known, was Boca Raton's first and only fire apparatus from 1926 until 1946, when an additional unit supplemented it.<sup>5</sup> Old Betsy provided the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> response until 1960, when it was relegated to 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> response. The engine was retired from active service in 1968,<sup>6</sup> "But stories about her never retire because her history parallels the history of the city which was started in 1925."<sup>7</sup>

Old Betsy arrived at the peak of the Florida Boom. The Cloister Inn, the resort hotel for America's upper crust, opened for its inaugural winter season on February 6, 1926; it was to remain Addison Mizner's signature architectural statement. To provide the necessary infrastructure,<sup>8</sup> the new Town Council, composed of Mayor J.G. Brown, Commissioner of Public Works B.B.Raulerson, and Town Clerk George G. Akins, contacted American LaFrance to purchase this fire truck. They then issued a check for \$1,000 and \$11,500 in notes to American LaFrance, payable over three years at six percent interest, dated April 6, 1926.<sup>9</sup> In a companion action on May 1, 1926, the Town Council issued \$500,000 in bonds to fund the construction of City

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; City of Boca Raton web site, [www.ci.boca-raton.fl.us/econ/history.cfm](http://www.ci.boca-raton.fl.us/econ/history.cfm).

<sup>3</sup> Jackie Mabesa interview with Pauline Raulerson Aylward, early Boca Raton resident, 1 August 1996.

<sup>4</sup> The Florida Legislature enabled incorporation in 1924, the Town formally incorporated on May 26, 1925 and the first election following incorporation was June 24, 1925. There is no U.S. Census population data for Boca Raton until 1930 when 447 people were counted.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Fryzel, "Boca Raton Firefighters," *Fiesta* Vol. 1, No. 3, July 1970, p.13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Jackie Mabesa interview with Darrold Hurlbert, retired Commander, Boca Raton Fire Department, 30 July 1996.

<sup>7</sup> *Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel*, Sunday, 2 July 1978, p.4B.

<sup>8</sup> The Town Council was elected June 24, 1925.

<sup>9</sup> *The Spanish River Papers*, A Report to the Membership of the Boca Raton Historical Society, Vol. V, No. 3, May 1977. Hereafter cited as Spanish River Papers.

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Hall, whose south bay was planned to house the new fire engine, to buy the water plant and to fund the Fire Department (\$25,000).<sup>10</sup>

But the South Florida Boom was ending: the schooner *Prinz Valdimar* sank in Miami harbor on January 10, 1926; rail freight had been embargoed; and the September 1926 hurricane nearly destroyed Miami. The resulting economic bust not only effectively removed Mizner from the management of the Cloister Inn but also, due to lack of tax revenue, obliged the Town to default on its notes to American LaFrance for Old Betsy, commencing in April 1927, only a year after its arrival.<sup>11</sup> That same April, the Mizner Development Corporation was forced into bankruptcy. Clarence H. Geist, a Midwest utilities magnate, successfully bid on the Mizner holdings. In doing so he came into ownership not only of the Cloister Inn, which he expanded into today's Boca Raton Hotel and Club, but also, by reason of owning over one-half the land in Boca Raton, became the local potentate during the 1930's. Geist then paid off the notes to American LaFrance.<sup>12</sup>

Following the hurricane of September 18, 1926, Old Betsy, along with other fire equipment, was sent to Hollywood, to a hotel filled with injured people. There, she pumped water continuously for over 100 hours.<sup>13</sup> Although Rufus White was reported to be the chief of the fire volunteers in 1925,<sup>14</sup> Guy Bender was first part-time paid chief of the Fire Department. This Department was formally organized by a local ordinance that set criteria for volunteers. The Fire Chief was given \$150 per year and living quarters over the fire hall at City Hall, and the firefighters and assistant chief received \$2 per drill and \$4 per fire.

With fewer than 200 mainly wooden structures, many acres of undeveloped land, a limited number of widely spaced fire hydrants, and a lengthy dry season, both brush and building fires were an ever-present threat in the Boca Raton of the 1920's and 1930's. Only the timely arrival of the sole fire engine and the dedicated efforts of the volunteer fire fighters saved many commercial buildings and residences from total destruction. Old Betsy's oversize wheels were ideally suited to navigating through sand to fight brush fires. One of the engine's most useful features was the ability to begin pumping water with a minimum of start-up time.

The year 1927 may well be representative of Old Betsy's fire suppression activities in the period from 1926 to 1946. Early newspaper accounts describe these events:

A bad brush fire which had been burning for two days (May 15 and 16) in the north part of town . . . with a change of the wind, drifted directly upon the town. . . . Burning fiercely and with flames at times 15 feet high as the tops of some of the tall pines caught fire, the licking tongues advanced upon the town. . . . John LaMont, the driver of the fire engine was out of town and Mr. Bender, who is fire chief, had the driving and most of the work to do. They would rush from one

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<sup>10</sup>Jackie Ashton Waldeck, Boca Raton, A Romance of the Past, Bicentennial Committee of Boca Raton, 1981. However, City Hall had to be redesigned from Mizner's plans to a less ambitious building.

<sup>11</sup>The Spanish River Papers.

<sup>12</sup>"... according to the best recollection of Boca Raton Police Lieutenant George LaMont. LaMont's father, John, was Old Betsy's first driver." Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel, Sunday, 2 July 1978, p. 4B.

<sup>13</sup>Delray Beach News, 1 October, 1926, p.2, col.1, and photograph.

<sup>14</sup>Delray Beach News, 30 April 1926, p. 2, col. 2.

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**Boca Raton, Palm Beach Co., FL**

part of town to the other, putting out the fire at several different points.<sup>15</sup> All along Boca Raton road. . . the flames were high and jumped the road in many places, but for the prompt assistance of several good citizens would have burned these (six) cottages up in short order. The fireman fastened the hose to the hydrant . . . and were compelled to stretch it. . . . a distance of nearly one-half mile.<sup>16</sup>

The newspaper account concludes with the admonition that “People [who are careless about setting fires] should be made to fight the flames and roll up the fire hose. They would be more careful if they had the work fall upon them which about half of the town did, Monday”(emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, a separate account credits the American LaFrance engine with saving the Floresta neighborhood three days later:<sup>18</sup>

At two o'clock, Thursday morning, May 19, the town was aroused by shots and shortly followed by the shriek of the fire siren as the faithful firemen, headed by G.J. Bender, rushed to the scene of the flames, which even as the alarm was given had nearly demolished the home of J.M. Tanner one block north of the school and near several other properties. . . the fire lit up the town for blocks. Although the men had the flames extinguished within ten minutes of the time the alarm had been given . . . the house and entire contents are a total loss. . . .The shots roused the Fire Department and they are certainly to be congratulated for their quick work. They were compelled to lay the hose all the way to the hydrant near the Deyo apartment and across the railroad. Fortunately, there were no trains due.<sup>19</sup>

Two unoccupied homes on the beach also burned to the ground in 1927 while the home of J.C. Nelson was saved. “The firemen were greatly handicapped by not being able to pump water from the lake which is their only source of supply east of the canal until the fire plugs are installed.”<sup>20</sup> This fire caused Harley Gates to pen a poem memorializing the event and Old Betsy (See attachment, “The Boca Raton Fire.”).

The summer of 1927 also saw a huge fire rage for days in the Everglades to the west, and the Boca Raton Fire Department was called upon to lend assistance.<sup>21</sup> On Labor Day of that year, the Boca Raton and the Delray Beach fire fighting companies gave an exhibition of their skill and speed in hooking up equipment preparatory to fighting a fire,<sup>22</sup> and later that month, seven men, including the Chief and fire fighter volunteers,

<sup>15</sup> Delray Beach News, 20 May 1927, p.2, col. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Delray Beach News, 20 May 1927, p. 2,col. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Delray Beach News, 20 May 1927,p. 2,col. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Johnson, Once upon a Time, Arvida Corp. 1979, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Delray Beach News, 27 May 1927, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Delray Beach News, 8 July 1927, p.2, col. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Delray Beach News, 3 June 1927.

<sup>22</sup> Delray Beach News, 9 September 1927.

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were sent to a meeting of the State Fireman's Association in Winter Haven, where they attended demonstrations in fire fighting methods. Clearly, fire prevention and suppression were town priorities.

During those years, Fire Engine No. 1 also served as a good will ambassador. Santa Claus would be driven through town on Old Betsy at Christmastime so he could personally deliver candy-filled stockings to the town's youngsters. Candy from wooden barrels loaded on the truck, as well as oranges from the local Butts family farm, would also be given out.

Changes in local fire protection came in the years after World War II. In 1946, the position of fire chief became fully paid, and by 1959 there were three other paid positions.<sup>23</sup> Also, post-war construction shifted from wood to CBS (concrete block, stucco) walls, resulting in a decrease in the number of fires. Chief John Loughery recalled the period from his appointment in 1946 until he retired at the end of 1964.<sup>24</sup> He added a 1946 Chevrolet pumper and personally designed a brush fire truck constructed from a 1946 International truck. Thus, after 20 years of 1<sup>st</sup> (and sole) response, Old Betsy was joined by other fire fighting apparatus, and became either as the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> fire apparatus to respond. Chief Loughery recalled major fires during his term, such as the fire caused by electrical failures at the Boca Raton Hotel, when smoke damaged the dining room and the gold leaf columns. He remembered the great fires at the Sterling Furniture Store, at North Federal Highway at 20<sup>th</sup> Street, and at Marlin Boat, on the present Florida Atlantic University campus. One large fire, he recalled, was a brush fire that raged west of the airport, and reached south to Glades Road and east to the Seaboard Railway. Old Betsy figured prominently in his recollections. Once, when the fire engine's fan belt broke and knocked off the fan arm, he called American LaFrance in Elmira, New York, on a Sunday. After five unsuccessful calls, he finally reached a janitor, who was startled to receive this urgent message for the needed parts. Within three days, the parts were shipped to the Chief by air.

In 1960, Old Betsy was further relegated to 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> response after Chief Loughery purchased a 1,000 gallon-per-minute pumper. Old Betsy performed tasks varying from pumping out floodwaters to responding to fires at commercial buildings.<sup>25</sup> In the mid-1960's, a main water supply pipe broke at the water plant at N.W. 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Street, creating a crater, sending a gusher skyward, and leaving the City without water. Within eight hours, Old Betsy had pumped out the crater, enabling repairs to begin. At about the same time, Boca Raton High School, 1551 N.W. 14<sup>th</sup> Street, was flooded and surrounded by a lake. The hard suction hose of Old Betsy sucked the water up and deposited it in a nearby canal, leaving the school dry after 24 hours of continuous pumping. A fire at the Sun n' Surf night club, located at 1111 N. Ocean Boulevard, approximately where Red Reef Park is today, happened during early morning hours and the building was destroyed. In the later 1960's, Fire Engine No. 1 responded to a high-rise fire at the San Remo, 2871 N. Ocean Boulevard. While the fire raged out of control, too advanced to be extinguished, Firefighter George Merwin heroically saved a Mr. Woodrey who was trapped on the roof.

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<sup>23</sup> An article in the local newspaper, The Pelican described the 1952 Fire Department as having one chief, 23 volunteers, 3 trucks with a fourth on order.

<sup>24</sup> Louis Fryzel, Fiesta, pp. 14, 15, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Jackie Mabesa interview with Darrold Hurlbert, retired Commander, Boca Raton Fire Department, July 30, 1996.

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Old Betsy's last fire, and the one that led to her retirement from active service, was the Jalbert Aerology Laboratory fire at 140 N.W.20<sup>th</sup> Street. The lab designed airfoils and kites for military purposes. "Her last great battle was to try to save the Jalbert Balloon factory from flames in 1967, but the truck's centrifugal pump and chain drive transmission were no match for the modern trucks at the fire."<sup>26</sup> In spite of all of their efforts, the World War II wooden structure burned to the ground. In 1967, another new 1,000 gallon-per-minute pumper was purchased for the new Fire Station No.2, at S.W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and Old Betsy was retired in 1968—after 42 years of active fire-fighting service.<sup>27</sup>

For the past 33 years, the fire truck has been a mobile "Good Will Ambassador," used for exhibitions, promotions, and public relations purposes. The Chamber of Commerce used to promote membership by driving the vintage vehicle up to prospective members' businesses. Today, Old Betsy still leads the annual City Holiday parade. During City historical celebrations, the truck is featured and is always a crowd favorite. Students are drawn to the antique engine and receive information, not only on the engine, but also on different aspects of fire safety. One of the most popular attractions at Fire Prevention Week Open House, held annually during October, is the opportunity for children to have their pictures taken aboard Old Betsy. At that time, they receive a quick lesson on advancements in fire fighting technology by comparing the vintage apparatus to more recent, state-of-the-art fire engines. Following the truck's authentic restoration, Old Betsy competed in a series of state antique truck competitions and won numerous awards (See the attached "Old Betsy's Awards in Antique Fire Apparatus Shows"). Despite the tremendous advancements in fire fighting equipment and procedures, Old Betsy reminds us of the humble beginnings of Boca Raton's fire department and the City's early commitment to protecting the lives and property of its citizens.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinal, Sunday, 2 July 1978, p.4B.

<sup>27</sup> In 1970, the Boca Raton Fire Department was comprised of 44 firemen, four pumpers, two brush trucks, one heavy rescue car and four auxiliary cars. "Fiesta" Vol. 1 No. 3, July 1970, p 31. The population in 1970 was 29,538, according to the U.S. Census.

<sup>28</sup> In 2000, the Boca Raton Fire Department, now the Boca Raton Fire-Rescue Services Department, consisted of 134 fully paid fire fighters and paramedics and 27 administrative and support staff, backed by 11 pieces of modern fire fighting apparatus, performing fire fighting and emergency medical services, hazardous materials operations, and community health and safety awareness programs. The population in 2000 was 74,764 according to the U.S. Census.

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Old Betsy's Awards in Antique Fire Apparatus Shows		
Awards	Date	Location
Best of Show, Best Restored	April 23, 1994	Broward County, FL
Best of Show, Best Restored, Furthest Hauled (farthest distance traveled to show), Hard Luck (trailer broke down)	June 11, 1994	Palatka, FL
Best of Show, Very Best Department Owned, Furthest Hauled	September 17, 1994	Orlando, FL
Fire Chief's Award (Best of Show), People's Choice (voted by public), 2 <sup>nd</sup> Place First Water (pumping water), 3 <sup>rd</sup> Place Balloon Race	October 29, 1994	West Palm Beach, FL
Best of Show, Best Restored Original, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Place First Water), 1 <sup>st</sup> Place Balloon Race	May 14, 1995	Tampa, FL

Source: Tom Sova, Equipment Specialist, Boca Raton Fire-Rescue  
Department

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**THE BOCA RATON FIRE**

Listen, my friends, and with grim satire  
I'll tell the tale of our town's big fire.  
Along in the night about half past three  
When all was as quiet as quiet could be,  
An alarm burst forth on the silent air  
And the sky was lighted with sudden flare.

Then a shriek of the siren, a clang of the bell,  
A noise that would reach to the gateway of hell,  
A wild roar of the motor, accompanied by cries,  
That would startle the angels far up in the skies.  
The engine in charge of Big Chief Bender,  
Comes tearing along as fast as they could send her.

Come of the rescue! A brave man is downed,  
And lies by the roadside, stretched out on the ground.  
Excitement is rampant, continually it grows,  
Lord help the brave fellow, he's stubbed his toes.  
Aid him to arise and give him a drink  
alone,  
His assistance may prove more value than you think.

Stand by for the water, and work hard to save,  
The homes of our neighbors from a fiery grave.  
No stream appears, then follows loud shout,  
Comes word to the front, the hose gave out.  
We can't reach the water, we'll lose all the glory,  
Without water, comes the end of a sorrowful story.

Two homes are in ruins, isn't it sad?  
With that beautiful engine, it's surely too bad.  
Hear the tax payer's sighs, hear the tax payer's groans,  
To think that it cost Sixteen Thousand bones.  
Still it looks awful pretty, and one shouldn't get mad,  
On its big brass plate, is the name of each city dad.

We ought to have hydrants, shut up, you darn fool,  
In the time of disaster, you at least can keep cool,  
We are sure goin' to have 'em, you needn't get funny,  
The only real reason, we haven't the money.  
Give credit to brave fellows who showed their spunk,  
Results are soon forgotton, they're mostly bunk.

All memories of this memorial night will fade,  
The debts of the past and future'll be paid.  
The town will outlive both shame and pride,  
As down through the coming years we glide.  
But in the galaxy of heroes, will their names stand

Those brave fire fighters of Boca Raton.

Harley Gates, July 8, 1927<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> From the archives of the Boca Raton Historical Society. Harley Gates was Boca Raton's first municipal judge and wrote the poem anonymously.



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Jackie Mabesa interview of Pauline Raulerson Aylward, early Boca Raton resident, 1 August 1996.

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION and JUSTIFICATION**

Because the fire engine is a resource that was designed to be moved, the boundary corresponds to the dimensions of the vehicle, itself.

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- 1
  - 1) Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1
  - 2) Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida
  - 3) American LaFrance photographer at factory in Elmira, New York
  - 4) 1925
  - 5) Unknown
  - 6) Official factory photograph, No. 6583
  - 7) 1 of 10
  
- 2
  - 1) Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1
  - 2) Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida
  - 3) Higby
  - 4) 1926
  - 5) Unknown
  - 6) Old Betsy in Hollywood, Florida. Old Betsy is to the left of two other American LaFrance fire engines. Caption: "American of France. These three engines [sic] have pumped water for 100 hours without stopping. Furnishing water for 4 hotels filled with injured persons—photo by Higby." Photograph taken in Hollywood, Florida, following September 18, 1926 hurricane.
  - 7) 2 of 10
  
- 3
  - 1) Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1
  - 2) Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida
  - 3) Unknown
  - 4) August 27, 1927
  - 5) Boca Raton Historical Society
  - 6) View looking northwest, following completion of City Hall (in background) with the Volunteer Fire Department. From left to right: Strout Eldredge; M.W. Stokes, Assistant Chief; O. Ozier; John LaMont, Driver; Harry Purdom, Assistant Driver; Guy J. Bender, Chief; O. Arnold; Sam Jenkins; F.M. Thomason; Kline Platt; and J.K. McClintock, Captain.
  - 7) 3 of 10
  
- 4
  - 1) Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1
  - 2) Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida
  - 3) Unknown
  - 4) August 27, 1927
  - 5) Boca Raton Historical Society
  - 6) Same fire crew as in photo 3, with Mayor John Brown, two unidentified City Councilmen, and Chief G.J. Bender to the right on the sidewalk in front of City Hall entrance.
  - 7) 4 of 10

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- 5      1) Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1  
       2) Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida  
       3) Unknown  
       4) ca. 1930?  
       5) Boca Raton Historical Society  
       6) View looking northwest in front of City Hall, with Kline Platt and Harry Purdom.  
       7) 5 of 10
- 6      1) Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1  
       2) Boca Raton, Palm Beach County, Florida  
       3) Assistant Chief John Johnson  
       4) November 2000  
       5) City of Boca Raton  
       6) Right side view, just outside bay at Fire Station No. 3  
       7) 6 of 10

Items 1-5 are the same for the remaining photographs.

- 7      6) View of Fire Engine No. 1 in front of bays at Fire Station No. 3, showing modern equipment in background.  
       7) 7 of 10
- 8      6) Front view of Fire Engine No. 1, in front of Fire Station No. 3  
       7) 8 of 10
- 9      6) Oblique view of Fire Engine No. 1 parked in bay at Fire Station No. 3  
       7) 9 of 10
- 10     6) View of Fire Engine No. 1 showing immediate surroundings in bay at Fire Station No. 3  
       7) 10 of 10

Boca Raton Fire Engine No. 1  
Boca Raton, Palm Beach Co., FL

Manufacturer's photo taken at the  
factory, 1925

