



# San Francisco Fire Department

*John Garvey*

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In San Francisco, history is as close as the sound of the fire engines and trucks racing by, sirens wailing. The San Francisco Fire Department took shape, as did the city, from the ashes and embers of the Great Fire of 1906. In the tumultuous seaport full of those seeking California's newly found gold, volunteer fire companies had to adapt to a teeming city full of canvas tents, wood shacks, kerosene lanterns, ocean breezes, and hilly winding streets. From a force that initially pulled hand-operated pumps and competed to be the first at a fire, traveling in horse-drawn equipment, the department has grown from a volunteer contingent of a few hundred to a company 1,800 strong and equipped to protect a city of 49 square miles, surrounded on three sides by salt water. The historic photographs of this volume document the establishment of the volunteer department on Christmas Eve 1849 and the inception of the paid force in 1866, as well as such colorful characters as Lily Hitchcock Coit, a belle who battled many a blaze with the volunteers and a portion of whose estate went to build the 210-foot Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill. Striking images, many never before published, illustrate how the fire department was affected not only by the well-known inferno of 1906 but by the six blazes that leveled the waterfront in the 1850s and a number of other fires throughout the city's history.

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