

The Rambler

. . . Inspects Three Fire Plugs

By JOHN McKELWAY

Got to talking with Roy L. Orndorff the other day. He's the District's mild Deputy Director of Sanitary Engineering.

He suddenly mentioned the three fire plugs, over 100 years old, which have yet to produce a drop of water.

We had been talking about the gradual disappearance of the old cast iron horse fountains.

The fountains were first installed about 1884 when the Humane Society got the idea it might be nice to provide horses with some cool, fresh water as they went their rounds in the city.

The society still owns the old troughs. Some carry the names of the donors. There are 24 of them still in place and before the District can remove them, city officials always check with the society. There have been no squabbles.

At one time, in 1920, there were as many as 156 throughout the city. Health officials were always somewhat skeptical of their value. The early models had a way of losing water back into the water system after horses had stopped to refresh themselves. Later models corrected the defect.

The most unusual one stands near the corner of Tenth and D streets N.W. Green, ornate, it once served both horses and people.

—o—
THERE IS SOME QUESTION who owns it, according to Mr. Orndorff, although it sits on District property.

Mr. Orndorff produced an old letter, dated 1893, which showed an Engineer Commissioner had asked somebody to check in to the fountain, apparently installed about that time.

The superintendent of the Water Department wrote that "the drinking fountain on Tenth street N.W. in front of the Post building was erected as a memorial to the daughter of Mr. Stillson Hutchins, a former editor of the Post, and is controlled wholly by the proprietors of "The Morning Post."

Mr. Hutchins founded the newspaper referred to in 1877 and for a time before he sold it, it was produced in a building at Tenth and D. The publication is reportedly still in circulation.

Mr. Hutchins' heirs probably could claim ownership of the fountain, according to Mr. Orndorff.

Then, in talking about the city's old water system, he mentioned the three fire plugs.

He told The Rambler they were out in Glenwood Cemetery.

The cemetery, just east of North Capitol street, was lonely and cold when The Rambler arrived. After a search of tombstones, he finally found the monument Mr. Orndorff had mentioned.

It was placed in honor of a fireman and in one side of the obelisk there is the sculptured scene of his death.

The poor man was run over by a hand-drawn fire wagon. It's the only tombstone The Rambler has ever seen which includes a picture of how the honored passed on.

—o—
THE STONE WAS PLACED on a triangular plot of land. And at each corner, there sits a fireplug, painted red.

Mr. Orndorff later explained he has come up with some records which show the plugs were ordered by the District in 1860. They were made in New York and arrived in Washington along with three others, made by a different company, in Boston. The Boston plugs apparently were put to use. The New York plugs were stored after, perhaps, it was found they didn't work.

On the tombstone, there is the inscription:

"Benjamin C. Grenup. Aged 24 years. Killed in discharge of his duty, May 6, 1856.

"This monument is erected by Columbia Engine Co. No. 1 to perpetuate the memory and noble deeds of a gallant fireman. A truer, nobler, trustier heart more loving, or more loyal never beat within a human breast."

Mr. Grenup, apparently, was quite a guy.

After the monument was erected, his colleagues asked the District Government for the fire plugs to place around the memorial. The water department was probably glad to get rid of them.

And there they are today, serving a useful purpose—while disconnected.