



Guide to the Liberty Engine Company No. 1 Records

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Liberty Engine Company No. 1
Title:	Liberty Engine Company No. 1 Records
ID:	MS-00128
Date [inclusive]:	1876 to 1927
Physical Description:	0.23 Cubic Feet (1 box)
Physical Description:	0.21 Linear Feet
Physical Description:	472 Digital Files (0.496 GB) JPEG
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	The Liberty Engine Company No. 1 Records (1876-1927) consist of two accounting ledgers belonging to the Liberty Engine Company No. 1, the fifth volunteer fire company formed in Gold Hill, Nevada in 1868. One ledger is signed by a the wife of J. H. (John H.) Witte, who was listed in an 1880 edition of the <i>Gold Hill Daily News</i> as a member of the Liberty Engine Company No. 1. The collection also contains banking transactions dating from 1926 to 1927 and a handwritten account of various payments made to the heirs of a Mrs. S. K. Witte in 1906. Some items in this collection are digital surrogates.

Preferred Citation

Liberty Engine Company No. 1 Records, 1876-1927. MS-00128. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Historical Background

Liberty Engine Company No. 1 was the fifth volunteer fire company formed in the Nevada Comstock mining towns of Virginia City and Gold Hill, and the first organized in the town of Gold Hill, Nevada. Beginning on November 18, 1863 as the Silver Bar Hook and Ladder No. 1, the

volunteers enlisted the aid of the Zoyoro Circus to raise money for the purchase of a two-wheel hose carriage, and on August 19, 1864 changed their name to the Liberty Hose Company No. 1. On July 28, 1868, the company purchased their first hand-drawn and hand-pumped engine and reorganized as the Liberty Engine Company No. 1, building a two-story firehouse the following year that featured sleeping quarters for the firemen and a union hall next door.

Fire was an almost daily threat in the mines and in the largely wood-constructed communities, and the efforts of the volunteer fire companies were the only difference between a contained blaze and a conflagration. Typically, each company consisted of 35 to 80 volunteer members and Liberty Engine Company No. 1 listed 68 firemen in 1869.

Fighting fires in the 19th century called for strength, endurance, and courage. Typically, the hand-pumped engines used by the volunteers were pulled by the firefighters to the scene; in September of 1870, as fire devastated the upper section of Gold Hill, nine men of Liberty Engine Company No. 1 volunteered to pull their engine through the blaze to reach the lower business section of the town. Reaching the section, the men were able to start throwing 'first water' on the fire, preventing its spread to the area.

Upon arrival at a fire, long hoses were dropped into available cisterns or a river, and the water was manually pumped to the surface. The pump consisted of long hoses attached to a tank that extended to either side of the engine; up to ten men would operate this device throughout the course of the fire. Given the force generated by the up and down stroke of the pump, serious injury and in the case of saloon owner and Liberty Engine volunteer Martin Panian, death after he stepped back from the pump, fell into the cistern, and drowned while fighting the great Gold Hill fire of 1870.

Liberty Engine Company No. 1, along with the other volunteer fire companies, began a slow decline in the 1880s due to the transition to professional paid fire companies and the closure of many mines in the area. By 1914, only three volunteer companies, including Liberty Engine, remained in Virginia City and Gold Hill, continuing to fight alongside the professional companies as required. Liberty Engine Company No. 1 formally disbanded in 1938.

Sources:

Steven R. Frady, *Red Shirts and Leather Helmets: Volunteer Fire Fighting on the Comstock Lode* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984).

Gold Hill daily news. (Gold Hill, N.V. [Nev.]), 26 April 1880. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84022046/1880-04-26/ed-1/seq-2/>.

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Scope and Contents Note

The Liberty Engine Company No. 1 Records (1876-1927) consist of two accounting ledgers belonging to the Liberty Engine Company No. 1, the fifth volunteer fire company formed in Gold

Hill, Nevada in 1868. One ledger is signed by a the wife of J. H. (John H.) Witte, who was listed in an 1880 edition of the *Gold Hill Daily News* as a member of the Liberty Engine Company No. 1. The collection also contains banking transactions dating from 1926 to 1927 and a handwritten account of various payments made to the heirs of a Mrs. S. K. Witte in 1906. Some items in this collection are digital surrogates.

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Arrangement

Materials remain as they were received.

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Administrative Information

Access Note

Collection is open for research. Arrangements must be made in advance to access digital files; please contact UNLV Special Collections and Archives for additional information.

Publication Rights

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Acquisition Note

Materials were donated by the Southern Nevada Historical Society via Mrs. J. H. Nicholaides; accession number T-11.

Disposition of Materials

Part of this collection was removed from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Libraries Special Collections and Archives' holdings. Materials were digitized as a means of preservation in 2019 and removed from the collection. Please contact speccoll.techserv@unlv.edu for more information.

Processing Note

In 2018, Melise Leech processed the collection and entered the information into ArchivesSpace. In 2019, due to insurmountable preservation issues, Sarah Jones digitized some items in collection for preservation purposes and discarded the originals.

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Names and Subjects

- Account books
- Fire stations
- Nevada -- History
- Gold Hill (Nev.)
- Comstock Lode Mining District (Nev.)
- Virginia City (Nev.). Fire Department

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Containers
Liberty Engine Company No. 1 records, 1876 to 1927	box 01 digital file 00