



1925 AHRENS-FOX JS-4 PISTON PUMPER - "HENRY"

By: Irving Jensen, Jr.

Model: J-S-4; Register #1235; Engine #783 – Lockland, Ohio Engine #2

Our Ahrens-Fox J-S-4 was originally shipped to the Lockland, Ohio Fire Department on February 27, 1925 where it operated as Engine 2. *Lockland is a suburb of Cincinnati.* The truck is fitted with the Ahrens-Fox **Model J** engine, a 90 horsepower, four-cylinder T-head engine which displaces 691 cubic inches. The letter "S" in the model number indicates the rear axle is "shaft-driven" (in lieu of a chain-driven) and the number "4" refers to the configuration of the apparatus: a model **J-S-2** is configured with the same four cylinder piston pump (capable of delivering over 750 gallons per minute at 120 psi) and same hose bed (with a capacity for 1,200 lineal feet of hose) as the J-S-4 but without chemical or booster tanks; model **J-S-3** is identical to a J-S-2 with addition of a chemical tank; model **J-S-4** is also identical to a J-S-2 with the addition of a 60-gallon booster (water) tank. The J-S-4 also carries a booster hose reel, a combination of ladders, extinguishers, and tools. As for dimensions, the J-S-4 has a 14'8" wheelbase and is roughly 22'3" long overall.





It was said in the 1920's and 30's that the Ahrens-Fox pump could throw water over the Chrysler Building in New York City. I am not sure if that is really true or not, but either way its strong testimony that Cincinnati-based Ahrens-Fox built powerful fire pumping engines. Ahrens-Fox pumpers are instantly identified by the giant nickel-plated sphere pressure-equalizer above the front-mounted multi-piston pump.

Fire equipment gets little use (hopefully) but needs to be at its best on a moment's notice and function reliably for hours, even days, on end. It was in this context that Ahrens-Fox's rock-solid reputation was built; the power and durability of their fire pumpers became legendary. Today, Ahrens-Fox pumpers are highly-sought-after by collectors and they are commonly referred to as *the Rolls-Royce of fire engines*.

The Ahrens-Fox Company traces its history to the beginnings of the steam fire engine era when Alexander B. Latta built his first steam-powered fire engine in Cincinnati in 1852. Chris Ahrens was an apprentice in Latta's firm and eventually assumed ownership, later merging with American LaFrance in 1903. Ahrens' son-in-law Charles Fox along with Ahrens' sons and another son-in-law parted company with the combined firm a year later to start another company which became Ahrens-Fox in 1910.

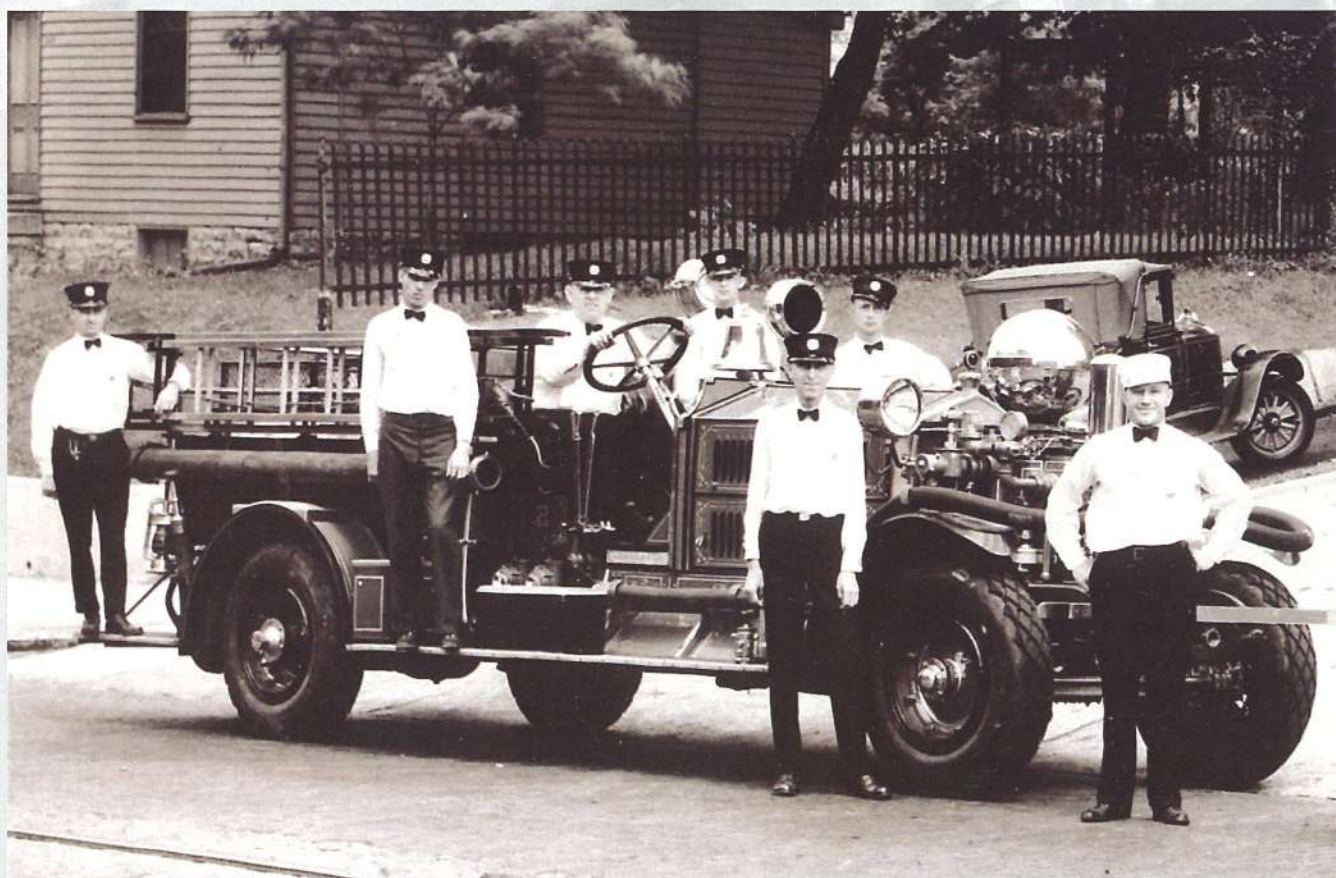
In 1911, while still building a few horse-drawn steam fire engines, Ahrens-Fox built its very first straight-framed pumper powered by a straight-six Hirschell-Spillman gasoline engine. *Ahrens-Fox didn't build their own engines until purchasing production rights for the L.P. Mooers-patent motor in 1914.*



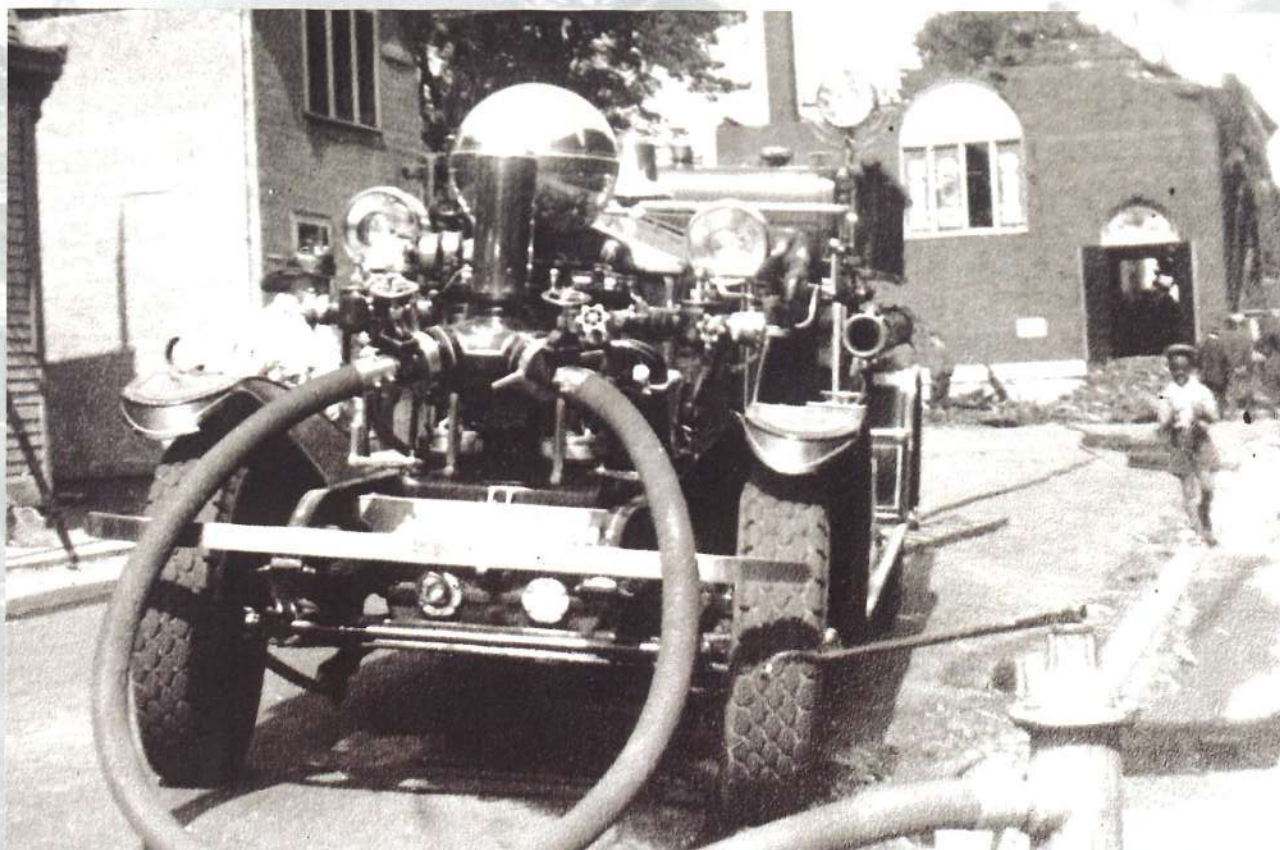
When the J-S-4 was delivered to Lockland in 1925, it was officially named *The Chief Hartman* after Lockland Fire Chief Henry Hartman who was instrumental raising the funds necessary to purchase their new pumper. But the Ahrens-Fox was always known to the firemen more affectionately as **Henry**.



The plaque mounted on the left splash panel of the Ahrens-Fox (between the running board and frame) dedicating the truck as The Chief Hartman. But to the firemen who served on the Ahrens-Fox it was more-affectionately known as HENRY, Chief Hartman's first name.



Along with members of the Lockland Fire Department, Chief Henry Hartman stands (far right) proudly before the truck he was instrumental in funding. (circa 1925)



HENRY is shown connected to a hydrant boosting water pressure.



The Lockland Town Hall/Fire Department building in the 1920's (left) and as it appears today (right.)



After 30 years of faithful service, **HENRY** was finally replaced by a Seagrave Pumper in 1952. A service period that long is quite impressive given that most modern trucks are lucky to get beyond 10 years in-service.



*The closed-cab Seagrave pumper which replaced Lockland Fire Department's Ahrens-Fox **HENRY** in 1952.*

After passing through the hands of two short-term owners, **Henry** ended-up in the hands of a collector in Buckeye Lake, Ohio.

In 1976, Tigger and I were on a Rolls-Royce tour when we stopped in Columbus to visit friends. While there, I learned about the former Lockland, Ohio Ahrens-Fox J-S-4 which was offered for sale. The truck was in the estate of Mr. Ervin O. Nance (the aforementioned collector from Buckeye Lake).

I made a return trip to Ohio where I met Mr. W. Nance George Hadler (Mr. Nance's grandson). After inspecting the truck George and I settled on a purchase price of \$4,500. Satisfied with our handshake deal, I left for Sioux City expecting to promptly complete the transaction and to make arrangements for transporting the truck to Sioux City.

On my way home, I passed through O'Hare Airport in Chicago where I was paged for an urgent phone call from George. He called to inform me there was a problem with the sale. He explained that when his grandfather died, his uncle was handling all estate matters until suffering a sudden heart attack. And with his uncle unexpectedly hospitalized it was up to George to pick



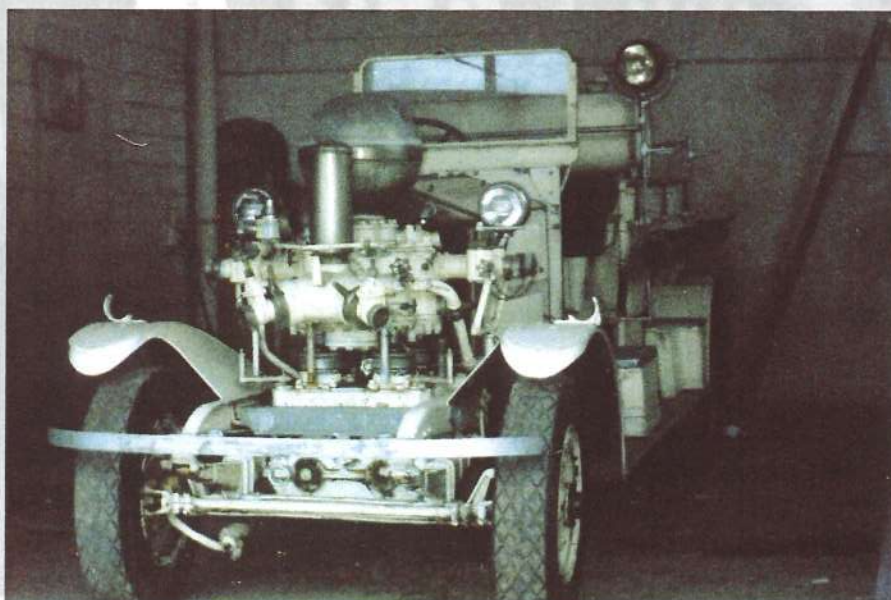
up the pieces. George said he stopped by the hospital after I left to inform his uncle about selling the Ahrens-Fox. But to his surprise his uncle wasn't pleased and angrily informed him that they already received a higher offer from a Cleveland-based insurance company who planned to display the Ahrens-Fox in their lobby.

I felt strongly that I negotiated in good-faith and our agreement should be honored, but I also understood their situation too. Figuring that I lost-out, I expressed my disappointment to George. But before I said much, George cautioned me not to give-up quite yet. He said the insurance company's offer was conditioned upon a favorable inspection of the truck (which they had not yet done).

After reevaluating the situation, I raised my offer (considerably) with two stipulations aimed at avoiding a potential bidding war: First, I expected a decision within one week; and second, *if* the insurance company's offer was less than mine, I expected my offer be reduced by 50% of the difference.

As it turned out the insurance company reduced their offer below mine which cleared the way for me to buy the Ahrens-Fox on May 1, 1978.

Even though the original Ahrens-Fox red/black paint scheme with substantial gold-leaf adornment was hidden under white paint (applied when Lockland changed their fire apparatus color), **Henry** was in very good condition. The truck was fully-functional and only missing a few items such as the original headlights, bell, "squirrel-tail" suction hoses, and "The Chief Hartman" dedication plaque.



Looking rather "plain" in all white, HENRY is in our company paint shop awaiting restoration. Within weeks, the Ahrens-Fox would be stripped down to the bare frame.



The Lockland Fire Department still had the original headlights and the Lockland Street Department had the “squirrel-tail” hoses (and both were willing to sell or trade them to us). The fire department also had both the original bell and plaque, but those items were now incorporated into a memorial to Chief Hartman and not available. With a little searching, I located an original Ahrens-Fox bell (complete with bracket and clapper). As for the dedication plaque, the Lockland Fire Department graciously lent me the original to have reproduced.

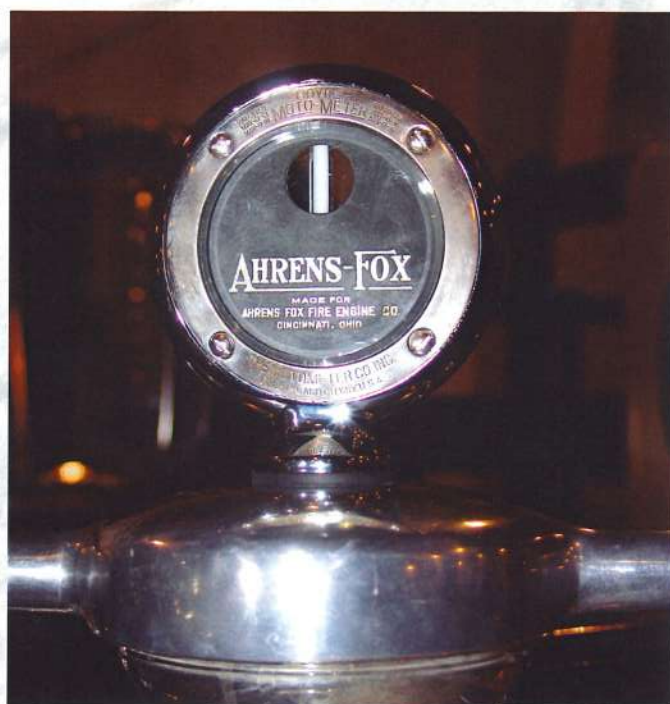
My first inclination was not to fully restore the truck, but once we got started I changed my mind.

We undertook the “frame-off” restoration in 1979 – 1980 in our company shop facilities. The project was completed by our two-man team of Mr. Dudley Dudgeon and Mr. Robert “Bob” Sweeney – Dudley handled the mechanical portion of the project while Bob handled the painting and cosmetic detail work. *Both of these gentlemen worked on the majority of the vehicles in our collection.*





The truck's engine was in very good condition and did not require mechanical overhaul. It was removed from the frame and stripped of all manifolds, pumps, and fittings for plating, painting, and other detail work. The same was true for the pump which was also not mechanically overhauled. We had no evidence of any internal problems and besides, we didn't plan to actively pump the truck once it was restored anyway.



HENRY undergoing restoration. (1979/1980)



The truck was repainted the correct shade of dark cranberry red known as Ahrens-Fox 101-red (originally KEM “Egyptian Enamel”) and beautifully re-adorned with gold leaf accents, lettering and filigrees. The Ahrens-Fox is simply gorgeous and abounds in elaborate and authentic details including nickel-plated kerosene lanterns, suction hoses, discharge hoses, axes, 12-foot ladders, bell, nickel-plated drum headlights and spotlights, and Clark disc wheels with black-wall radial tires.

The only item missing from the truck is a removable wire “basket” that mounts across the top of the hose bed (which was used for stowing turnout gear). The basket wouldn’t be difficult to recreate, but I opted to leave it off.

Henry was shown in 1980 (June) in the Antique Automobile Club of America – Central Division National Spring Meet in Des Moines, Iowa. It was awarded **First Place – Junior** (class 23).

