The Tale of Jack and Jack Famous East Des Moines Fire Team - Once Champions of the World

The days of real glamour and competition in the Des Moines Fire Department went out with the famous old horse teams of the past, as they were supplanted with motorized equipment.

Day in and day out for many years, the most famous team of all, Jack and Jack, world's champions, darted in and out the doors of the East Des Moines station, answering the call of duty. The famous pair led an exciting and adventurous life, participating in tournaments for many years against the best throughout all the Midwest.

After long years of service, Jack and Jack were finally pensioned by the City Council.

"Old" Jack was 23 years old at the time of pensioning. He was known as a man killer when purchased 17 years previously. The animal was being driven by a farmer named Terhune, when through an accident, Terhune fell over the dashboard, and the horse, becoming frightened, kicked the farmer in the head, killing him. Everyone then was afraid of the horse and the owners were glad when the Fire Department took it. But old Jack eventually turned out to be as gentle as a kitten.

Young Jack was raised near Council Bluffs and was given to Saint Joseph Home in Des Moines as a carriage horse. The academy sold the horse to F.M. Hubbell, who tried for a year to get a mate for Jack, but failed. He sold him to the Fire Department for $175.00. The horse proved a perfect mate for "Old" Jack.

Both horses were of good bloodstock and developed great speed. In 1903 they won their first race at the state firemen's tournament. For years, the team won the best prizes at tournaments. In 1904 at Council Bluffs, Jack and Jack won first place, which entitled them to be known as "World's Champions". The record was maintained for a number of years until a Sioux City team lowered it. The team was finally retired from competition, having been outclassed by Fred and Mack, also of the Des Moines Fire Department.

Jack and Jack had many narrow escapes in spectacular fire runs in Des Moines in their day. In a collision with a street car at Sixth and Walnut Streets, Jack and Jack escaped without a scratch, but two fireman, C.A. Carlson and J.L. Clark were killed and N.S. Edwards and J.E. Riggs, the driver, were injured. Captain Harvey Brown, also on the wagon, was uninjured.

Jack and Jack were in great demand for a long period as attractions at various fairs throughout the state. A movement was on foot at one time to have the famous team exhibited at a show in Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Councilman F.T. Van Liew said: "Jack and Jack are entitled to a pension if any Fire Department horses were even entitled to one. They were quick and cool headed and a pet of the entire Department. Usually worn out horses are turned over to the Street Department, but if I were to attempt to do that with Jack and Jack, the Fire Department would mob me. They say they don't want to see them pulling a junk wagon or ash cart".

The pensioned horses were finally pastured on the farm of Wesley Riggs, brother of veteran Joe Riggs, who held the reins when most of the prizes were captured in tournaments. The action of the City
Council specified that the City should pay nothing for the keep of the horses and that the animals would do no labor.