



# REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN FIRE FIGHTERS

by Scott Mellott, 15/A

Obituary is a word that one does not use lightly. The *Webster Dictionary* defines the word obituary as: a notice of a person's death, with a short biographical account.

If one's name shows up in the obit section of their local newspaper, that could only mean one thing, they are no longer among the living.

The reason I am breaching the subject of one's obituary is because, for the last year, I have been researching the backgrounds of some of our Fire Fighters - most of those who existed in the early part of the century. The two main tools for this research are the Houston City Directories and the obituaries from the local newspapers.

The City directories contain valuable information. The directories list the person's name and occupation, which has proven valuable in tracking down our Fire Fighters. In many of the years, the listing actually contained the rank and where the Fire Fighter worked.

The obituaries also contain much needed information. It gives the survivors of the deceased and this, most of the time, allows us to track down family members. When we locate the family, we ask for information on their family member and then request pictures of the Fire Fighter which were collected during their tenure in the Houston Fire Department.

Last fall, I was given a picture of Station 7's horse drawn Steamer, which was taken in front of St. Joseph Infirmary, which is now known as St. Joseph Hospital. The picture was dated 1920. The apparatus was hooked up to two horses and the driver was in the seat and the other crew member was on the ground. What was very special about this picture is that the person who owned this picture named not only the Fire Fighters in this picture but actually wrote down the names of the two horses. The writing on the picture read "Mike Latrop-Driver" (who was also the owner of the picture) and next to that read "Riney Beecher - Engineer - Dead" then next to that were two words, "Mutt" and "Glass." These two names were probably written later because the ink was different and the word dead was added, which we now know happened 7 years later.

Now this brings me to the obituary of Riney Beecher. My research partner, Julie, not knowing that I had this picture, found the obit of Mr. Beecher while looking for another Fire Fighter's obit who had died about the same time. So I will now stop talking and share this great account of Riney Beecher, who served the Houston Fire Department well.

*Houston Post-Dispatch:*  
*Wednesday Morning, July 06, 1927*

## VETERAN CITY FIREMAN DEAD AFTER CAR CRASH

Never in 19 years of driving and riding fire wagons and trucks did Riney Beecher, 46, 1911 St. Emanuel, have an accident during a run. Yet when he died Tuesday, it was a result of injuries in a motor accident the day before when he was pinioned beneath a gravel truck he had been piloting to the ball game. A gravel truck!

Old-timers in the department talked over in sorrow his death Tuesday, and hearing them you got the impression that Riney symbolized, in a way, that romantic chapter in the life of the city that was the horse-drawn fire wagon.

For Riney Beecher used to drive those plunging steeds with consummate skill through the crowded streets as they raced with an almost human eagerness for the danger point, the heavy wagon careening wild-

ly behind them. Those were the days when small boys lined the sidewalks to watch the fearsome columns pass and vow that nothing but the life of a fireman would ever satisfy them when they grew up.

And Riney loved his horses. Chief C. J. Ollre said he always cared for them as he would have liked to be cared for had he been in their places.

## UNDERSTOOD HORSES

And they understood him, those horses. They always gave their best for him. That is perhaps one of the reasons why Riney had the name in the department of always being on the spot at the right time, which was no easy thing to do when there was only one paved street in the third ward, Crawford, and when it was no uncommon thing to have to jack up the wagons to get them out of the mud.

It required teamwork between men and horses. The old steamer, belching its thick black smoke and showers of sparks, was Riney's charge. It was perhaps not as dangerous to manage as some of the other apparatus, because it was stationed near the plugs, and usually some distance from the fire, but it was of vital importance. Without it, the pressure necessary to reach high or seemingly inaccessible places with the drenching streams would have been impossible. It needed a sure man, and Riney was that. He never missed being on the job.

And Chief Ollre says he was one of the most careful men he has ever had on his force. He piloted his horses always with remarkable skill and never had an accident. When changing conditions necessitated their giving way to motored cars, Riney was somewhat of a loss for a while, but he learned how to drive, the big engine several years ago and always handled it with the same efficient prudence which had characterized him with the horses.

It is for that reason, all the more of a shock to the chief and his many friends in the department, that he should have come to his death by an accident. Riney was on his way to West End park in a truck with four friends to see the baseball game between Houston and Beaumont. He was driving. Suddenly a car shot out from behind a truck in front of them. Riney whirled to avoid it, the wheels of the truck buried themselves in a gravel pile and the machine overturned, pinning the fireman beneath it. He was rushed to St. Joseph's in a Fogle-West ambulance and some hope was held out for his recovery, but his injuries proved too serious.

His connection with the department began on December 1, 1908, when he enlisted as a pipeman at station No. 10. He was later shifted to No. 8 as stoker on its steamer and shortly thereafter was promoted to engineer on pumper No. 4.

## SON ESCAPED

It was in 1923 that he was made chauffeur on a pumper at No. 4, the position he held at the time of his death. Among those with Riney at the time of the accident, all of whom escaped injury, was his 18-year-old son, Jack. Besides the boy, he is survived by his wife, Mrs. Annie O. Beecher; his mother, Mrs. Annie Beecher; another son, Riney, Jr., and a brother, Paul, of St. Louis.

Funeral services were at 4 p.m. Wednesday and held from the home. Rev. F. M. Johnson and Rev. T. J. Windham conducted the services. Interment took place in the Evergreen cemetery with Wall & Stabe directing. Members of the Fire Department attended the final rites for their comrade.

Pallbearers were Chief F. C. Seibert, district No. 8; Captain J. D. Fritsche, station No. 1; Captain Pat Daly, station No. 19; Captain D. W. Heath, station No. 17; Captain D. C. King, station No. 7, and Henry Levy, Station No. 9.

