



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

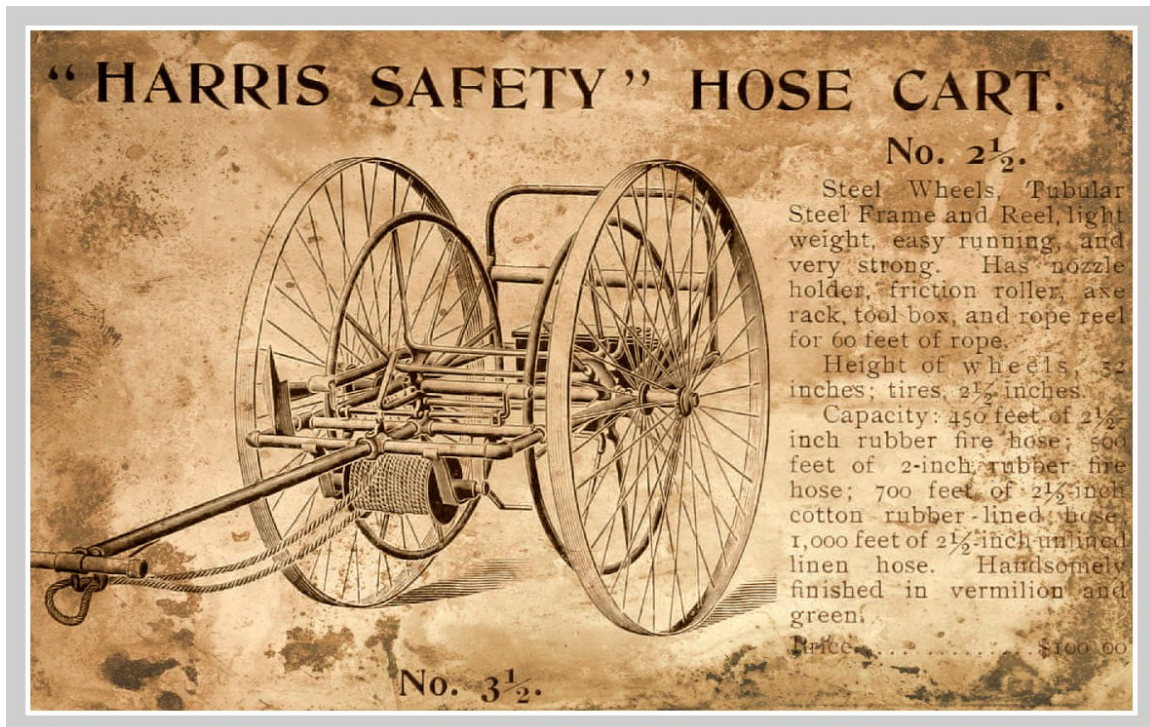
April 2017

Hose Cart Racing

A look back at a now defunct sport and a world record set at Dunkirk in 1904

Hose cart racing has followed the bustle skirt, the cigar store Indian and the nickel hamburger into the dusty halls of history.

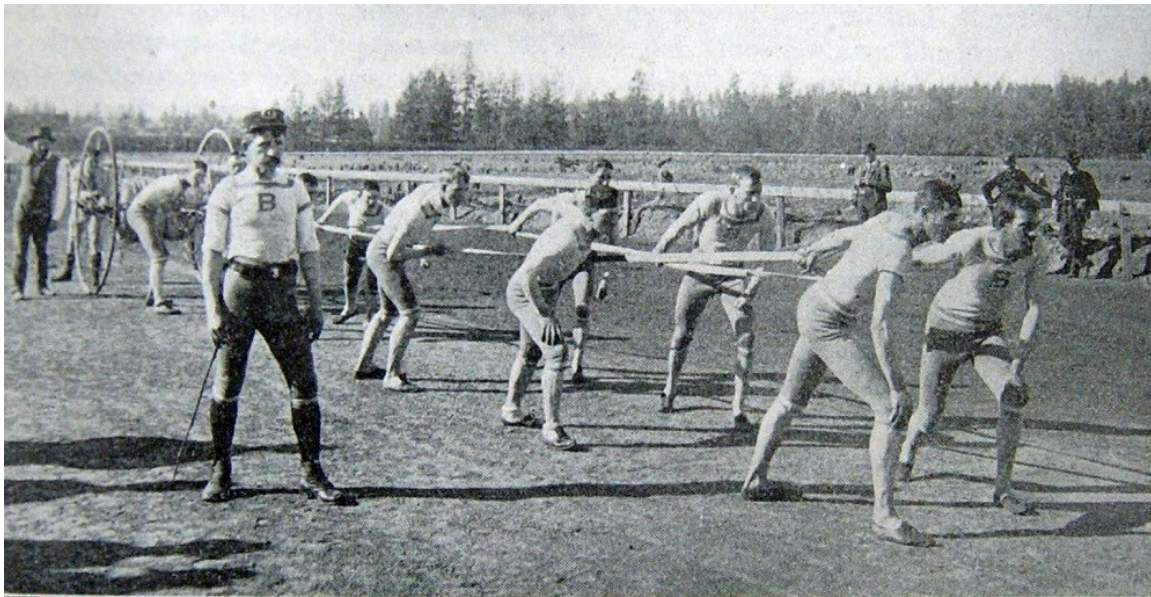
But there was a time when the sport of hose cart racing, spawned by volunteer fire departments, was BIG. More than 3,000 teams were registered with the New York State Volunteer Fireman's Association shortly after 1900.



Hose cart racing was a labor of love for men of brawn and daring who pitted their speed, muscle and teamwork against others in an exciting event that drew large crowds of spectators.

Hose cart racing, like rodeoing, grew from a job – a necessity. The working cowboy turned his skills as a bronc buster, steer wrestler and calf roper from the range to the arena.

Since speed was essential when volunteer departments manually hauled their hose carts to fires, it was natural that rivalries should spring up between departments.



Rules of the sport were simple. They consisted of running a distance of 100 yards while pulling a hose cart containing 50-foot sections of hose, making the hose connections, hooking the hose to the hydrant and readying for water.

Jamestown had a hose cart team called the Martyns, named after its organizer M. George Martyn, owner of the Martyn Lounge Company in that city, which claimed the world record at New York State Firemen’s Convention held in Dunkirk in August, 1904. Of course the word “world” is used somewhat loosely in this connection. Each fire company had 300 feet of hose on its cart at the Dunkirk meet. Upon the start the team ran 100 yards, stopped and fastened one end of the hose to a hydrant. It then reeled off 250 feet of hose, made the connections and fastened the nozzle to it. Each team member was assigned to a connection. The anchor man was the fellow who made the hydrant connection. His was a task of speed, strength and finesse and Jamestown had one of the best in Joe McVeigh.

More than 20 teams from New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio entered the Dunkirk meet. The favorite was the unbeaten Coleman Hose Company of Union City, PA, led by the great black sprinter Harry Batson, who allegedly was not even a resident of that fair city. The Colemans had toured the eastern US vanquishing with ease all opponents.

All day long the teams streamed into Dunkirk. Bands played, flags waved and spectators arrived to cheer on their favorites. Area newspapers gave the meet banner-line treatment.



Top contenders in addition to the Jamestown Martyns and the Union City Colemans were the Sixth Ward Hose Co. from Hornell, NY; Tyrone Hook and Ladder from Johnsonburg, NY; Hose and Steamer No. 1 from Niagara Falls, NY; Solvay Hose Co. from Solvay, NY; Torrent Hose Co. from Ithaca, NY; Lightning Hose of Albany, NY; Union Fire Co. #2 from Ballston Spa, NY and Frank Funk No. 3 from New York City. Seventeen other winners of area eliminations were entered including the Dunkirk Hose Co., the Barker Hose Co. from Fredonia and 2 other departments from Jamestown.

Eventually the battle lines were drawn between the Colemans and Martyns. Late in the day according to newspaper accounts of the day “the Colemans made their finest run. They started like lightning and a line connection by Doc Driscoll, one of the fastest in the country outside of McVeigh, gave them an excellent time of 27 seconds,

equaling the time set earlier by the Hornell team. The Martyns responded with a 26 and 3/5 second time to capture the championship.” The winning time was said to have been a new world record.

The news was quickly telegraphed to Mr. Martyn at his factory and he wrote back: “The Martyns who run are faster than the martins that fly. I will help you celebrate when you return.”

The Martyns were awarded \$400 for their efforts. The Union City and Hornell departments shared the second and third place monies of \$250 and \$100.



Members of the victorious Martyns were Ed Marsh, Joe McVeigh, Rainey Peterson, Charlie Durin, Frank Eggleston, Pooley Newstrom, Jim Hayes, Art Brainard, Jack Peterson, Jack Hayes and Frank “Skinny” Moynihan.

The Martyns returned to Jamestown via the Chautauqua Lake Railroad with the engine whistle tied down. Hundreds of cheering hometowners, plus a band, met them at the city limits and the parade wound to city hall. Mayor J. Emil Johnson spoke warm words of welcome “for our great champions.”

It was a simpler world then and having a fire department that could run faster and hook up a fire hose quicker than anyone else was a cause for great pride and rejoicing.

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