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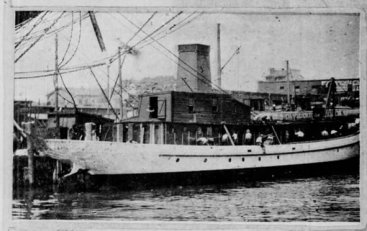
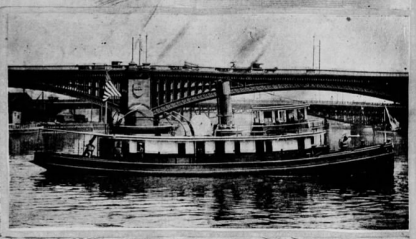
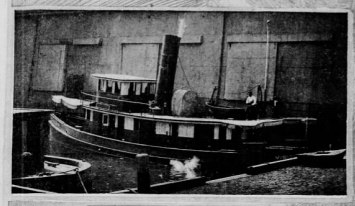
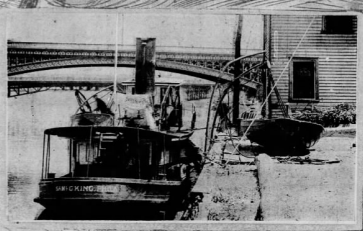
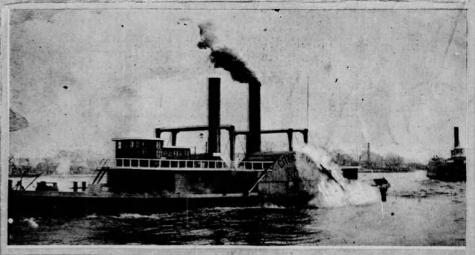
NEW ADDITION TO PHILADELPHIA'S MUNICIPAL FLEET

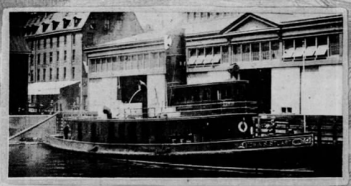












WHEN the prow of the new fire-boat, Samuel H. Ashbridge, cut the waters of the Delaware for the first time a few days ago there was added to the municipal fleet of Philadelphia the most graceful and completely equipped fireboat in the world. The launching of this new boat calls attention to the fact that the city maintains for the protection of the property on the shores of the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers a fleet of ten boats.

Few people are aware of the existence of these vessels as a fleet, and only casual attention is called to them when they are engaged in fighting a fire or in saving a life. Yet the shores of the rivers are daily watched by these faithful guardians, and the slightest indication of fire or flood, or danger from ice or drowning needs with their immediate response.

Abraham L. English, as Director of the Department of Public Safety, controls the fleet. The boats are manned by men of great skill and who thoroughly understand the handling of the craft and the best ways for dealing with fires. The engineers and pilots are required to have licenses, as are the engineers and pilots on the river boats. The fireboat crew's ownership must be up to the stand and. It is a notable fact regarding these men that despite the fact of their many brave rescues and deeds of daring they refuse to talk about themselves and turn the conversation upon some other subject, usually to the boat to which they belong and which they have cared for with great pride. Every effort is made to keep the boats "spick and span," and no moment is wasted that can be spent cleaning decks, polishing boilers or setting things in order.

The veteran of the fleet is the William H. Stokley, which lies at the dock at Penn Treaty Park. The historic old landing place of William Penn stretches out along the river front and affords a good view of the little vessel as she rides on the waters of the Delaware. The Stokley was launched in April, 1874, which makes this boat nearly twenty-seven years old.

By the side of the Stokley are two little steam-launches which are used for rafting down river unmanned and for towing other craft. They are also for putting out when cries from the drowning ring to the shore. These are swift launches and succeed in running and tacking so rapidly that one must be swift to elude them. They are manned and run by the Stokley's men.

The Samuel G. King lies at the Chestnut street dock, Schuylkill. She is a trim little boat, 98 feet in length, and ever bright and clean from the frequent washings and burnishings of her decks and brass. Lieutenant Francis is the genial commandant, and his weather browned face beams with greatest pride when he speaks of "his boat." "She is the trimmest craft afloat on this stream," he will say as he strokes his beard; "from stem to stern she is a solid, staunch vessel."

The Edwin S. Stuart is the finest fireboat in equipment at present in the service. She is 115 feet long, has four pumps, and can throw 9000 gallons of water a minute. She carries 1000 gallons of water, which is the principal factor in all big fires.

At Washington avenue wharf is the little fireboat Visitor, which was at one time used by the physicians of the Board of Health as a conveyance to boats to be inspected.

At the House of Correction are three ice boats, which, for obvious reasons, are not in commission at present. They do faithful service in the winter.

Last but not least is the Ashbridge, the only palatial fire boat afloat. Her beautiful appointments and complete equipments are due to the cultured taste of Mr. Abraham L. English, a gentleman of prominence in yachting circles.

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