



# THE HOUSEWATCH

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## CURATOR'S CORNER

by Sean Britton

This month's Curators Corner highlights the Heffernan Distributor. Invented by FDNY Deputy Chief James W. Heffernan in 1926 as a tool to fight fires in the cargo holds of ships, it was also useful in extinguishing flames in basements and other confined spaces.

This tool is a giant, weighing about fifty pounds and containing six smooth bore nozzles equally distant but about 7 degrees apart in a vertical plane. The nozzles can cover an area of 14,400 square feet and discharges about 1,200 gallons per minute at a pressure of 175 pounds. It is used with two 3-inch lines from high pressure or from pumping engines or with one 3 1/2-inch line from a fireboat. Two nozzles of 5/8-inch cause it to revolve and these can be regulated as to the speed of the distribution.

Fire Commissioner John J. Dorman awarded Deputy Chief Heffernan the Administration Medal for the year 1926. This medal is awarded annually to the member of the Department who makes the best and most progressive suggestion or recommendation for the good of the service during the year.



From its invention through late 1927, the Heffernan Distributor was responsible for extinguishing fifteen fires in the cargo holds of ships, and two fires in cellars of buildings. This immediate usage led the department repair shops to begin the manufacture of ten additional distributors for use on all fireboats.

The advent of concrete piers in the mid-20th century, as well as increased maritime safety rules greatly lessened the need for the Heffernan Distributor. However, this object shows the ingenuity of the officers and firefighters of the FDNY. A problem arose that existing equipment was not sufficient for, so to greater protect the citizens of NY, and its firefighters, Chief Heffernan developed a new piece of equipment rather than rely on an inferior method.

The Heffernan Distributor is currently on display in our Marine Exhibition on the first floor.

