



THE HOUSEWATCH

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CURATOR'S CORNER

by Sean Britton

In 1865, the volunteer fire department was abolished by a state act which created the Metropolitan Fire District and the Metropolitan Fire Department (MFD). This gave control of the fire departments in New York and Brooklyn to the Governor who appointed his Board of Commissioners. There was never any effective incorporation of the fire departments of the two cities during this period. It wasn't until the Greater City of New York was consolidated in 1898 that the two were combined under one common organization or organizational structure. The change was met with mixed reactions from the citizens, and some of the eliminated volunteers became bitter and resentful, which resulted in both political battles and street fights. The insurance companies in the city, however, finally won the battle and had the volunteers replaced with paid firefighters. The paid fire department members were selected from the prior volunteers. All the volunteer's apparatus, including their fire houses, were seized by the state who made use of them to form the new organization and form the basis of the current FDNY. The MFD lasted until 1870 when the Tweed Charter ended state control in the city. As a result, a new Board of Fire Commissioners was created, and the original name of the Fire Department City of New York (FDNY) was reinstated. While only in existence for a short period, the Metropolitan Fire Department played a key role in the establishment of a professional, well-trained Department. With the exponential growth of New York City, a permanent paid force was required to protect both the citizens and property of its inhabitants.

We recently received a unique and rare donation from this era. Pictured are a painting from 1870 of Engineer Robert V. Mackey, and the helmet he was wearing along with the speaking trumpet in his hand. These items were generously donated by Judy Taylor of Woodbury, Connecticut, in honor of her father Daniel B. Thomas. We are excited to announce that this amazing trio is slated to go on permanent display in the museum's second floor gallery this week.

