

By Don Kenyon

# The mighty Moreland story

**When California needed motorized fire rigs  
a California company met the need**

Imagine a time when a hugely-populated state, chock-full of natural resources at the mercy of endless cycles of fire and drought, had NO statewide firefighting plan. There was certainly nothing modern, mechanized, and response ready.

That time was just a little over 100 years ago in California.

After an extra-intense couple of summers with catastrophic fires in the 1920s (that were largely left to burn themselves out) resulting in great loss of life, property and irreplaceable beauty, the State of California purchased four (or six, depending on whom you ask) expensive Moreland

RR-6 cab and chassis trucks. These Morelands were then converted at the state-owned Sacramento shops to become specialized fire apparatus.

Among the unique features of these trucks were places to put dinnerware for meals when out on a fire. These trucks were not dual-rear-tired (like many Moreland heavy-duty trucks), and they featured metal spoke wheels and six-cylinder Continental flat head engines. Another interesting feature was that these came installed with a "auxiliary" two-speed transmission mounted between the usual transmission and the differential, essentially doubling the number of speeds.



1933 state labor camp crew stationed at International Park Camp. This is the first state fire truck license E-4601. Stationed at San Jacinto (Riverside County). From the Fritz-Metcalf photographs collection.

The bodies on these trucks were constructed in the open style and feature an unmistakable state look. No other fire truck looks quite like them. They were true California trucks, built in the city of Burbank, north of Los Angeles, at Moreland's sprawling 25-acre plant. Moreland had a 20-year run building all types of heavy-duty trucks, though only a few found their way into use as firefighting rigs. The company motto was, "Built in the West -- for Western Work". The Moreland plant closed in 1940, and the Moreland buildings were later used by the Vega Aircraft Corporation, a subsidiary of Lockheed.

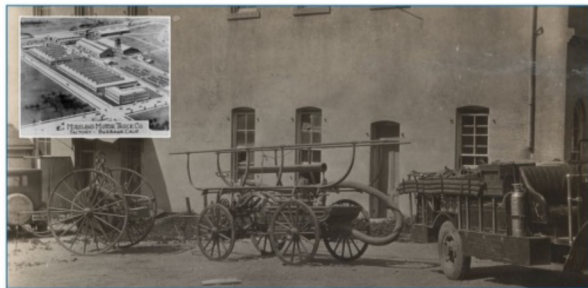
Since these first few rigs built were "prototypes", they were sent to their respective duty stations from Ukiah to the westside to get feedback during use in the field. The result of this feedback required all the trucks to return to the state's

Sacramento shops for periodic updates. Things on these rare trucks got swapped around. For example, the headlamp placement changed when they interfered with the front pump.

During one of these "updates" in Sacramento, the seats between the first four (or six) trucks got mixed up! After all they were interchangeable. The problem with this is that the seat "vin/serial number" tags no longer matched their corresponding frame numbers! The "STATE" number (1,2,3,4...) therefore got swapped too.

## The one dollar bargain

As far as we know, only two of these original trucks remain. One is beautifully restored at the Kern County Fire Department (but built using two trucks and perhaps



Ancient and modern firefighting tools at San Andreas, circa 1930. The new State rig on a Moreland 2-ton chassis carries 225 gallons of water, a 105 gallon back-pack pump with 1500 feet of hose and hand tools. Photo inset an aerial view of the Moreland Truck factory in Burbank, circa 1930. From the Fritz-Metcalf photographs collection.



Rear view of new Moreland State fire truck May, 1930 assigned to Riverside County. Drinking water insulated container on the right. Back pump filling nozzle in platform at left. From the Fritz-Metcalf photographs collection.



The Boyajian 1929 Moreland from a photo taken in 1970.

a non-RR-6 chassis).

The other original Moreland fire truck is in private hands having been purchased by antique agricultural machinery enthusiasts, brothers John and Mike Boyajian of Dinuba. They have been tracking the truck since the 1960s when it saw service at Orange Cove Fire Department in Fresno County.

This State Moreland fire truck in question came from the Sanger CDF fire station to the little community of Orange

Cove, via an "appropriation" by a Fresno County Supervisor. It then went to a grain farmer by the name of Long (for \$1) near Orange Cove to put out fires. Then Orange Cove FD purchased the truck from a cattle rancher in the area - again for just \$1.00 as long as the Orange Cove FD would respond to his fires, too.

And so it became Orange Cove No. 1, replacing an unreliable Kelly-Springfield antique fire truck. Prominent members of Orange Cove immediately became volunteer



State Fire Truck on Moreland 2-ton chassis built in State Highway Shops 1929 at cost of \$4200 (\$76,000 in 2024 dollars), fully equipped. Tank 225 gallons of water, 105 gallon knapsack, pumps, 1000 ft. 1 1/2 in. hose, 500 ft. 1 in. base. Hand tools and kitchen equipment for 50 men. Top speed was 40 miles per hour. From the Fritz-Metcalf photographs collection.



The restored Kern County FD Moreland.

fire fighters, overnight! Time moved on and fire apparatus developed the once fast Moreland became increasingly outmoded, only to end up the Bailey Ranch near Orange Cove. Around this time a half-hearted attempt was made at resuscitation, but it did not take.

Luckily, the Boyajians caught wind of the impending demise of the truck and interceded, if only to use parts off it to repair the other Moreland trucks in their collection. (By the way, this writer also caught wind of the truck's upcoming demise but was a day late and a dollar short).

John and Mike Boyajian did not immediately realize their fire truck was one of the "first four or six" State Morelands after their 1999 purchase until local fire historian Gordon Oakley and another local history-minded friend, Stanton Filer, advised them. It was at this time some of the original "California State Department of Fire" lettering became visible on the truck. In about 2005 a Cal Fire employee named Dan Lang approached the Boyajians about purchasing the truck for restoration and repatriation. There was a brief attempt at a fund-raiser but it went nowhere.

Along the way, this historic Moreland was active at the famous 1955 McGee fire in the Central Sierra Ne-

#### Legal Corner - Continued from page 13

cal or lumbar disc bulging but the firefighter has no symptoms in either his/her spine, then the scan is really meaningless and may not even support a finding of an industrial injury. In such cases, I recommend waiting to see if the firefighter becomes symptomatic and when that occurs, file a claim and utilize the scan to support the injury.

Filing a continuous or cumulative trauma claim at the end of one's career is a legitimate way to seek compensation for current conditions that require treatment and cause disability or impairment. It is not a means to file for conditions that aren't symptomatic or require care as that would be an exercise in futility. A firefighter can lend legitimacy to an end of career claim by consulting with his/her family physician or orthopedist and document what physical ailments currently exist. The firefighter should not indicate those ailments are the results of any old specific injuries that are probably barred by the statute of limitations. Rather the firefighter should detail the complaints and describe what duties they've engaged in over the years. Even if your personal doctor downplays the contributions of your job, an independent evaluation is going to occur in the work comp case once your claim is filed. It is that opinion which will control your claim and having a record or paper trail of treatment will absolutely help.

It's clear from this article that an end of career is a viable workers' compensation claim but one that must be filed properly and with sufficient facts. Always consult with a knowledgeable CSFA attorney and never try to do things on your own. If you don't proceed properly, the results could

vada's Sequoia National Forest. The McGee charred over 300,000 acres, and was the state's most disastrous fire in three decades. The sturdy Moreland did its part, providing fresh water and equipment to feed hungry and tired firefighters!

For those of us that love old and historic vehicles, especially commercial vehicles and antique firefighting equipment, I cannot think of a more photographed RARE bunch of historic trucks than these Morelands. Seemingly dozens of photos are available on digitized websites like Calisphere. The State was quite proud of these trucks and trotted them out for parades and demonstrations of their abilities!

The historic restored Kern County Fire Moreland was sent to Sacramento when Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was inaugurated and took part in the festivities!

Today the Boyajian's lovingly keep their Moreland along with a sizeable collection of antique agricultural machinery at their ranch in Fresno County, safely preserving the history of these unique California-born firefighting rigs. 📷

About the author: Don Kenyon is a freelance writer with a lifelong love of old vehicles and machinery.

be disastrous and life changing. In the meantime, stay safe and healthy. 📷

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ed via cell service and is also provided with backup satellite communication for situations where the cell signal is lost.

Exterior wildfire sprinkler systems can take advantage of current technology and provide an increased level of protection from flying embers. With automated activation, the owner or occupant does not even need to be on-site. The structure is protected, and any combustible furniture, toys or appliances added after construction are also protected if they are within the 30-foot defensible space.

Now that the technology is available to provide this level of protection, homeowners, fire officials and designers need to take advantage of exterior wildfire sprinkler systems. 📷

1. <https://wildfiretoday.com/2017/05/05/10-years-ago-today-ham-lake-fire/> May 1, 2024

2. <https://tshs.org/tshs-news-releases/embers-cause-up-to-90-of-home-business-ignitions-during-wildfire-events/> May 1, 2024

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