

## HONORED BY FIREMEN.

### The Historic Name of Melvill.

### Who Bore the Name So Long Cherished in the Department.

### The Venerable Pitcher Now the Property of the City of Boston.

For a century the name of Melvill has been connected with the Boston fire department as that of a fire warden, and later as the name of several fire engines, both hand and steam.

Maj. Thomas Melvill for 47 consecutive years, from 1779 to 1826, was a fire ward of the town and city of Boston; the last 25 years of that period he served as chairman of the board of fire wardens, a position of equal importance in those days to that of chief of department in later years. He was chairman of that board at the time it was legislated out of existence and a board of engineers substituted therefor and Col. Samuel D. Harris elected chief engineer, in 1826.

Maj. Melvill was born in Boston Jan. 15, 1751. His father, Allen Melvill, was the son of a clergyman of Scoone, in the village of Leven, county of Fife, Scotland, where he was born and lived until 1748, when he came to this country and established himself in a mercantile business in Boston. He married Jane, a daughter of David Cargill of Londonderry, N. H., but a native of England. Thomas Melvill, the subject of this article, was their only son, who was left an orphan when 10 years of age, and placed under the care of his grandmother. He was educated in the Boston public schools, and graduated from Princeton College in 1769.

To please his relatives he studied for the ministry for a year or so, when his health became impaired and he decided to enter the mercantile business. He visited Europe for the purpose of acquiring practical information relative to the importing business and to establish a correspondence with some leading commercial houses in London and elsewhere. He was in London when the celebrated John Wilkes was expelled from the House of Commons and committed to the Tower for writing the famous 15th number of the North Briton. He participated in the events connected therewith, being an intense lover of liberty and an ardent hater of tyranny. He afterwards had a watch made with the figures "45" engraved on the case, in commemoration of that event and his devotion

#### To the Rights of Man.

He was one of that immortal band who in December, 1773, boarded the English fleet in Boston harbor and threw their rich cargo of tea into the water. He was an active participant in all the leading events which resulted in the revolution. He was a captain in the first regiment of volunteers raised in Massachusetts and assigned to a command in Col. Craft's artillery corps. When the British evacuated Boston he was in command of the forces on Nantasket Heights, which watched the movements and hastened the departure of the British fleet. He was in the Rhode Island expedition when the English forces were compelled to abandon Newport. He was commissioned a major during this campaign. On his return to Boston with his command garrison duty only was done until the close of the war, when he was appointed naval officer, and when the Federal government was established he was appointed surveyor of the port of Boston and was the first person to hold those two important positions. Afterwards he was transferred to the naval office, which position he first held and for 40 years he was constant in the active and faithful discharge of the duties of that office, retiring when nearly 80 years of age.

After his retirement he was annually elected to the State Legislature until his death in 1832.

He possessed many social and domestic virtues and was honored and loved by all. He was active in all things that would advance the morality, intelligence and prosperity of his fellow-countrymen. His benevolence was universal and he was a large and willing giver to deserving charity. He was a true Christian of the olden type.

He lived for many years in Green st., near the old church, now a paper box factory. Always at night, when there was an alarm of fire, he would place a light in his front window, and after he retired from the service he would always come to his door, both night and day, and salute the fire company in that section when it passed.

He was a most active commander and took a great interest

#### In the Fire Service.

When he retired his colleagues on the fire wards board presented him with a silver pitcher.

There was a fire in a residence on Green st., near Maj. Melvill's home, Sept. 7, 1822, at noon, and he took an active part in its extinguishment, more than the infirmities, incident to old age, warranted his doing, but fire enthusiasm was greater than his vitality, and his overexertions resulted in a severe cold, followed by diarrhea of a violent nature from which he was unable to recover, and passed away at 9 o'clock Sunday evening, Sept. 16, 1832, at the age of 81 years. He was buried the following Wednesday with fireman's honors, the Melvill engine company, 1., in charge. His remains now lie in King's chapel burial ground.

In April, 1832, Rapid engine company, 13, located in Leverett st., petitioned the board of engineers, of which T. C. Amory was then chief, to change its name to Melvill, in Maj. Melvill's honor.

This request was granted, and June 20 this company, of which Charles N. Robinson was then foreman, with a new engine bearing the name of Melvill, paraded the streets, and in front of Maj. Melvill's house gave an exhibition of the engine and a test of its working qualities. This scene was made the subject of an oil painting, which now hangs in the old State House with the collection of the Bostonian Society. After the drill Maj. Melvill presented the company with the official staff which he carried to fires for 47 consecutive years. A complimentary banquet was tendered Maj. Melvill that evening by this company. Chief Amory and many other department and city officials were present.

At the request of Mrs. Priscilla Melvill, the officers of the Melvill engine company assembled at her residence on Green st., Jan. 11, 1833, and received from her the silver pitcher presented to her departed husband, by the old board of fire wards, which he requested be presented to the company bearing his name after his death. Mrs. Melvill was at this time on her death bed, and it was with considerable effort that she presented the pitcher, with the understanding that it "be held and enjoyed by the present and all succeeding companies attached to

#### Engine Melvill."

At a subsequent meeting of the company proper action was taken on the receipt of so valuable a gift, and a compact made to the effect that the pitcher should always be the property of the city of Boston, for the especial use of the engine company belonging to the Melvill, and that when the name Melvill should cease to be attached to any fire company the pitcher should become the property of the Boston fire department.

Melvill engine, 13, became Melvill, No. 6, when the department was reorganized in 1852, and when steam superseded muscle in the early 60s the same name and number were retained and remained as such until the fire commission came in, in 1874, when the name Melvill was discontinued, as were then all names on apparatus.

For 40 years the name Melvill had been attached to a piece of Boston's fire apparatus in active service in honor of one who was for almost a half century one of the head department officials and for a quarter of a century its chief.

In 1874 this pitcher, then deposited in one of Boston's oldest banks, in accordance with the presentation agreement, became the property of the fire department, and is probably now in the fire commissioners' office.

The name Melvill did not cease as a name for an engine company when Boston abandoned it in 1874. When the old hand engines were sold the old Melvill, No. 6, went to the town of Southbridge, where its name was retained until 1888, when the engine was sold to the Boston Veteran Firemen's Association, which of all bodies was the one most proper to have that engine and retain so illustrious a name as Melvill in the fire service of Boston. This organization, however, last year decided that the name Melvill should cease to appear on any piece of fire apparatus, and 57 years after that honored name was first used for an engine, those whom it would be supposed would be the last to send it into oblivion, substituted therefor the less appropriate name of Boston Vet.