

WEST SACRAMENTO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PRESS RELEASE

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On Thursday, April 12, 2007, "Lizzie," one of the West Sacramento Historical Society's vintage fire engines, returned home after renovation work done by the inmates at the California State Prison, Solano in Vacaville. The apparatus was completely dismantled and restored by the inmates in their vocational training program under the supervision of John Gast, lead instructor. The restoration for this fire engine was the last public project for the prison. Sierra Hart Towing of West Sacramento originally delivered the fire engine to the prison for the restoration work in 2003 and then recently returned it to West Sacramento.

In 1937, the community of Bryte, formerly called Riverbank, built "Lizzie" on a 1935 Chevy truck chassis using parts from the Southern Pacific rail yard in Sacramento. Because she was built with so many locomotive parts, it was said, "When a train whistle blew, she would stand to attention." It remains a mystery why she is called "Lizzie" and in some early documents the fire truck is called "Betsy." The fire truck has also been referred to as the "Wine Barrel."

While most of the renovation work was completed at Solano, there still remains further modifications to complete: the seat upholstery needs work, the rear bumper needs remounting, and the fire engine needs a spare tire hanger, new electrical system and tires. Since the inmates did not work on the engine, the society does not know its condition, but will test it after the electrical system is upgraded.

Thom Lewis and Roger Sornsen of the historical society fire apparatus committee were present when "Lizzie" was picked up. A plaque of appreciation was given to John Gast to express the society's gratitude for the work done and another plaque listed the names of all the inmates involved with the project. The historical society also expressed their thanks to Alan Slape from Sierra Hart Towing for arranging the tow and to Russ Meyers and Tommy Cardenas for transporting the fire engine.

Thom Lewis, the new president of the historical society states, "We are extremely grateful for California State Prisons, Solano and to those who volunteered their services. "Lizzie" symbolizes the early community of Bryte. After her retirement from fire suppression the community could have sold her for scrap but instead kept her for future generations. As a historical society, it is our responsibility to do the same."