Photo Gallery

Long Life Light Bulb

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The fire station in Livermore, California is home to the oldest known working light bulb, according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

The first record of its providing illumination was in 1901 when it was installed in the Livermore Fire Department hose cart house. The 4-watt bulb has moved a time or two in its career and was finally installed in its present location in 1976. A hand-blown bulb with long carbon filament, the 103-year-old now hangs high over the Livermore fire trucks in the station house. The company that made the bulb was Shelby Electric Company located in Shelby, Ohio.

You can visit the bulb in person or on the Internet. The Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department Bulb Cam shows the bulb's status around-the-clock at ***www.centennialbulb.org/cam.htm***.

Photograph courtesy of R. J. Aerial Photography.

This bulb has stayed lit during the birth of powered human flight, the Ford Model T automobile, the rise and fall of Prohibition, two world wars, space exploration, poodle skirts and miniskirts. President William McKinley was in office when it was first lit.

Photograph courtesy of the Shelby Museum of History, Shelby, Ohio.

Circa 1900—These Shelby Electrical Company workers may have made the bulb that still lights the fire station in Livermore.

An Expert Opinion: Why has it Lasted so Long?

"It probably has to do with the very low wattage of the bulb (like a night light bulb), and the size of the filament. In the early days of bulb manufacture, handling anything very small was difficult, and the filament may have been overly sturdy, just for handling reasons. Other factors include the filament support design and the quality of the vacuum and seals. Unlike tungsten, carbon does not experience a current inrush when cold. This means that it is not likely to burn out suddenly when the power is turned on, as modern bulbs are inclined to do. Finally, there is just the fact that there is always an unpredictably long-lived example in any population. It is still amazing that it lasted so long."

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