

The eternal light of California



At a fire station in California, the world's oldest light bulb has been burning for 118 years. By now not only the light bulb, but also the town Livermore are famous and are even in the Guinness Book of Records. On May 16, 2019 a report on the radio station, Bayern 2, from Markus Schuler once more drew attention to the centennial light bulb – an unbelievable story in the age of LED.

Something to read, listen and experience live!

She is mounted at a height of five meters on a black cord right underneath the ceiling in Fire Station 6 of Livermore, California. According to the Guinness Books of Records, she is the world's longest burning light bulb producing light for 118 years.

On June 8 1901, the light bulb was switched on. A present from Dennis Bernal, the owner of the local "Livermore Power and Light Company" to the fire station, which was then located on the first floor of the city hall. Thus, the men did not have to illuminate first the kerosene lamps during night alarm to find their equipment.



The Shelby Electrics Company in Ohio manufactured the light bulb in the 1890s. It is a common carbon filament bulb just as Thomas A. Edison produced it in 1879. The Centennial Light was originally a 60-watt bulb, but is now very dim, emitting about the same light as a 4-watt night-light, which is probably the main reason for its longevity [1].

Evidence suggests that the bulb has continuously burned except for three short



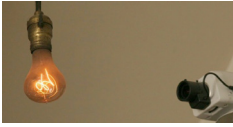
interruptions. Two of those were due to relocation and one due to a building renovation. Lynn Owens remembers the second relocation in March 1976 very well. Then he was head of the old fire station downtown. The fire station was to be made earthquake safe according to the regulations those days. The new construction of Fire Station 6 was considerably less expensive. "We packaged the light bulb in a polystyrene box

and buckled her up on the front seat of a pick-up truck. Then we moved her with her own police escort to the new location", reports Lynn, a stocky 65 year old with a grey beard and uniform cap. "The urban electrician reconnected the wires while we were all holding our breath – but the dam light did not want to switch on. Therefore, he gave her a little hit, and sure enough, she switched on. I think this was the very last time anybody touched her." "Do not touch the bulb" is the most important rule the new Captain Peter Richert, today's shift manager, has learned when he was moved to Station 6 two years ago. "Nobody wants to be the guy under whose supervision the bulb dies". This could mean bad luck, added the shift colleague John [2].

The "Centennial Light Bulb Committee" of Livermore operates a website where you can follow the daily life of the light bulb with a Webcam recording every 30 seconds. Livermore became the town with the bulb. ■



WEBCAM



<http://www.centennialbulb.org/photos.htm>

BAYERN 2 Radiowelt



<https://www.br.de/radio/bayern2/sendungen/radiowelt/livermore-in-kalifornien-die-aelteste-glueh-birne-der-welt-100.html>

References

- [1] Wikipedia: Centennial Light, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centennial_Light
- [2] Zeit Online: Das ewige Licht von Kalifornien, Christoph von Marschall, 28. August 2009
<https://www.zeit.de/online/2009/36/die-ewige-birne>
- [3] Bayern 2: Radiowelt – Livermore in Kalifornien von Markus Schuler, 16.05.2019
<https://www.br.de/radio/bayern2/sendungen/radiowelt/livermore-in-kalifornien-die-aelteste-glueh-birne-der-welt-100.html>

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