

North Carolina Fire Horse Histories

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For about four decades, fire departments around our state used horses. Teams of one and two horses (plus the occasional mule) pulled steam engines, hose wagons, chemical carts, combination hose and chemical carts, aerial ladder trucks, service ladder trucks, chief's buggies, and more. They served from Asheville to Elizabeth City, from Morganton to Wilson.

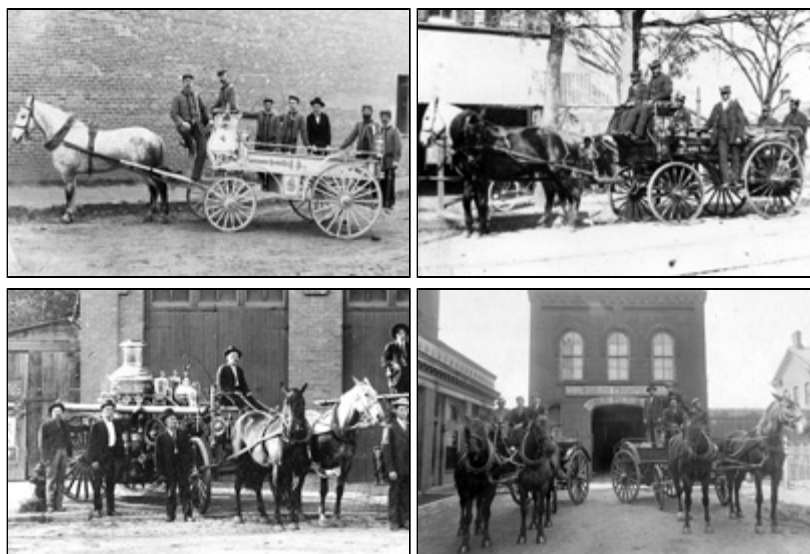
The largest equine fleets were located in Wilmington and Charlotte. Those cities as many as 14 and 13 horses in service, respectively, at the turn of the last century. Source of Sanborn Maps for that information.

Horses first appeared here in the 1870s, replacing the hand power of volunteer firefighters. They were put to pasture in the early 1910s, with the arrival of motor apparatus. The animals were adored by both crews and citizens. The men who cared and operated for them developed strong emotional attachments. The horses were, well, members of the department. They were well-remembered after they were gone.

To centralize information about this period in our state's history, a new site has been created on the subject of [North Carolina Fire Horses](#). Content includes the excellent essay "Day of the Fabulous Fire Horse" by Oxford poet, author, and newspaper columnist Thad Stem Jr., which appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* in 1966. Also included are assorted fire horse histories, as found on the web and in fire department yearbooks. Plus Sanborn Map information, on numbers of horses and types of apparatus. And pictures!

[Visit the web site](#). See what you think. Collectively, it paints a pretty good portrait of regular operations in a horse-drawn fire department. Additions and corrections are welcome. Particularly citations, as authors need to be cited for the yearbook excerpts. Shoot me a private message, and I will expand the content accordingly! Thanks for reading, hope you enjoy. Oh, and a pun. Guess this particular post makes me a confirmed... wait for it... neigh sayer.

Photo credits below, left to right, top to bottom: Greensboro Historical Museum, North Carolina State Archives, Greensboro Historical Museum, Raleigh Fire Department.



In Henderson Station #2 they still have the grooves in the floor that the horses used to get traction

rnl (Email) - 06/03/10 - 10:31

It has also been said that the grooves served the function of helping their urine drain from the floor. Wonder if that's true, too? Wander down to Charleston, and their very old Station 2, and you'll see the same floor grooves.

Legeros - 06/03/10 - 20:04

Something interesting, from the west coast. Rules and regulations of LAFD, from 1901! <http://www.lafire.com/archive/RulesRegul..>

RULE 13.

CARE OF HORSES, APPARATUS, HOSE, ETC.

SECTION 1. Horses shall be fed not more than four quarts of grain and about twenty pounds of hay daily, and twice a week shall be fed a bran mash.

SEC. 2. Hours for feeding horses shall be 6.30 A.M. and 4.00 P.M., and must be watered at least thirty minutes before feeding time.

SEC. 3. Horses shall be thoroughly groomed every morning, their hoofs picked out and cleaned, their manes and tails washed with soap and water once every week and thoroughly dried after washing; the sheath shall be washed every two weeks. Grey or white horses may have stains sponged off with warm water and soap, but must be thoroughly dried immediately. White legs may be washed in the same manner, otherwise the legs must never be washed. Washing horses is strictly forbidden, unless by permission of the Chief Engineer, and then only with bucket and sponge.

SEC. 4. On returning from an alarm, horses' mouths and nostrils must be sponged out, and may be given a few swallows of water, and, if warm, must be scraped, rubbed dry, and blanketed. Sweat should be removed from around the eyes and under the tail with a damp sponge. Horses must never be given grain while hot after a run or exercise.

SEC. 5. Teasing or annoying horses, or teaching them tricks is strictly forbidden.

SEC. 6. Horses shall be exercised daily within three blocks of the house, for a period of not less than one-half-hour, hitched to the apparatus (Sundays excepted). In wet weather the horses shall be exercised without the apparatus.

SEC. 7. A bucket must not be used to catch the horse's urine in, nor shall they be taught any like peculiarities. If a horse is staining to urinate, straw should be shaken under him. The stall should be washed out immediately and all manure must be removed immediately.

SEC. 8. If a horse is injured or shows signs of sickness the commanding officer of the company must be notified at once.

SEC. 9. Horses must be treated kindly, taught by kindness to come promptly to their place and perform their part of the service without the unnecessary use of the whip. The unnecessary use of a whip by any member will subject the offender to suspension or dismissal.

Legeros - 06/03/10 - 21:46

hey mike any way to find out more info on the sign above the doors. would love to see that at the firehouse. Man i hope that thing just didnt get trashed.Also i am talking about the Raleigh Rescue pic do you have any more history about this would love to have some more info on it.

DuckR3 ([Email](#)) - 06/08/10 - 12:31

Name: (real name
preferred)

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Web Site: (optional)

Comment:

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Yes

No

/ [Textile](#)