

Fire Engine Explodes, Burns Beaufort City Hall, 1966

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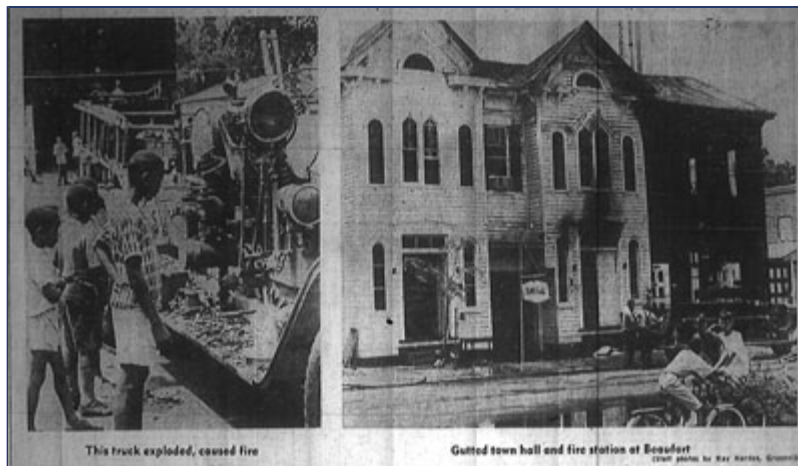
Here's a story we hadn't heard before. On August 5, 1966, the Beaufort town hall and fire station was gutted after a ~~1928~~ 1927 American LaFrance pumper exploded. The fire started at 8:30 a.m. when Fireman Elmund Rhue, one of the department's two full-time drivers, was starting the trucks for their morning warmup. He reached for the throttle of the LaFrance and "it went off like a dynamite explosion" reported the *News & Observer*.

"Fire was all over" and he grabbed a CO2 fire extinguisher. He thought he had it controlled, then "everything went black and the next thing I knew I was outside." He was pulled from by the blaze by Tom Bennett, who also tried to control the fire. Rhue, burned on his feet, ran back into the burning station to sound the station alarm-- signal 34-- and start removing the other trucks.

Beaufort firefighter responded, along with Morehead City, Newport, and Fort Macon Coast Guard fire departments. They battled the blaze until about 11:00 a.m. The 90-year-old building was gutted, with damage estimated at about \$250,000. Two fire trucks were also scorched. It was the second fire in the history of the 1870 building. The town hall was originally a public school and located on the court house square.

It burned in 1927, heavily damaged by a fire that killed a prisoner in the jail. Since that time, the police department had been located in separate quarters. Town officials said most of their records were intact, if soggy. Morehead City loaned Beaufort the use of a similar fire engine, until theirs could be replaced. The town's fire alarm system was also destroyed. The lack of strong coastal winds, noted the news story, prevented worse damage. (And this explains why there's no historic fire station building in Beaufort in present day!)

[See subsequent posting](#) about Beaufort fire station locations. Click to enlarge:



This truck exploded, caused fire

Gutted town hall and fire station at Beaufort

(LEFT PHOTO BY RAY HARRIS, SPENCER)

American LaFrance truck that caught fire was a 1927.

My father was Assistant Fire Chief and was the first ff on the scene with Mr. Rhue. He assisted in removing the other trucks.

A line was layed to the hydrant on the corner by the #5 dodge truck and firefighting began.

In the picture on the right the fire station was the right half of the building. Town hall was to the left. In the center of the picture (behind the sign) was the area of the old jail. That area had be made into a small bay for the rural tanker.

Jesse - 12/04/15 - 08:16

Thanks Jesse! From the John Peckham database:

6262 BEAUFORT NC – 145 TRIP. – 25483 – 1/24/1928 – 7533

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Legeros - 12/04/15 - 08:19

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