

## A Tale of Two Fire Departments in Elon College

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The story is a familiar one. Members of a municipal-funded or municipal-serving fire department separate themselves into a second squad serving rural residents. A second organization is created, and a new fire department is formed. The resulting relationships might be harmonious, or might be heated. The latter was the case in the town of Elon College in Alamance County in the mid- to late-1970s. Members of the volunteer Elon College Fire Department (BCFD) formed the separate Boone Station Fire Department (BSFD) and a rivalry resulted. The second fire department operated from around mid-1975 to around late-1978. Here's an incomplete narrative of the events, based on articles found in *Hose & Nozzle* (H&N) magazine and the *Burlington Daily Times* (BDT). Plus data from the North Carolina Secretary of State, and a pair of photos from the fire department's web site. Maybe our readers can fill in the gaps, or add additional data points. Apologies for crazy combinations of past and present tense.

[ Before 1975 - The Elon College Fire Department is a volunteer organization that is not incorporated with the state. ]

[ June 20, 1975 - The non-profit corporation Elon Rural Fire District is incorporated. ]

H&N - Sep./Oct. 1975 - The Board of Alderman has informed Elon Rural FD that they must join with Elon College FD, "or leave." The Mayor sent a letter on July 11 to the rural member inviting them to serve, and under the command of Fire Chief Fred Loy. Otherwise, each ERFD member must withdraw from ECFD, turn in any equipment in personal possession, and immediately cease using ECFD equipment or facilities. Until the time of their meeting, notes the story, the Aldermen didn't know that Elon College had two fire departments. Nor did some firemen. The members of the rural department have formed a corporation to make it official. They want their own department, to give better protection and to raise more money. Except for a new (newer?) fire truck, they say their equipment is the oldest in the county. They want a fire district created for the rural district they serve, though that would have to be approved by county commissioners and then voted upon by citizens. They also want control of nearly \$4,000 collected for a rural fire truck. (The town recently purchased a new fire truck, but that was "for the town.") The funds are currently being held by the town in reserve. And the town plans to continue to hold the money until a fire district is set up, if that happens. At that time, the town will cooperate with the two fire departments. Until then, ECFD will continue to serve both the town and the four-mile radius rural area that it's served in the past.

[ May 28, 1976 - Elon Rural Fire District Inc. changes their name to Boone Station Fire Protection Association Inc. The name refers to one of the thirteen townships that Alamance County is divided into. Township 3, named Boone Station, is comprised of Elon, parts of Burlington, and parts of Gibsonville. ]

H&N - May/June. 1976 - *Burlington News-Times* writes editorial about the dispute, which has been brewing for the past eight months. Meetings have been held and proposals have been offered, but nothing has been resolved. The result is that Elon College "has in effect two fire departments." ECFD is located on Williamston Avenue, just south of the business district. They have a "modern station with good equipment." ECRFD is located on Gibsonville Road, just outside the town limits. They're using a converted service station, with an older pumper and an older "water truck." [ Is that building still standing? What's the address? ] The rural department removed itself from the town department eight months ago. They set up their own operation for covering four square-miles outside the municipal limits. That district, however, is still "under the jurisdiction" of ECFD, which receives \$200 per month to provide service. The rural department wants that money. The editorial asks such questions as "why did the rural members leave in the first place?" And "why do they feel the need for two 'fire units' in the same area?"

H&N - May/June 1976 - Fire Chief Fred Loy resigns from ECFD, citing health reasons. Bill Loy Jr. is appointed Acting Chief until the department holds elections in June. Chief Loy received \$400 a year in his position.

[ January 5, 1977 - The non-profit E. C. Volunteer Fire Department is incorporated. On March 25, 20013, they change their name to Elon Fire/Rescue. ]

Historical photo dated 1977 from Elon web site. Click to enlarge:



H&N - Mar./Apr. 1977 - Elon College Rural Fire Department is now named Boone Station [Volunteer] Fire Department. County commissioners voted on an ordinance that clarified the rules regarding fire department operations in Alamance County. The ordinance stipulates that only "authorized fire departments may fight fires in the county," and doesn't recognize BSFD. Violations to the ordinance, if approved, are misdemeanors. The ordinance passed with the first round of voting, but must be approved with a second vote. (The first vote passed with a slim margin, three to two.) There's also a proposal on the table to create a new fire district for BSFD, made from part of ECFD and E. M. Holt FD fire districts. It's opposed by a special committee created to study the problem. The Burlington Fire Chief also opposes, as he notes part of the proposed district will some day be part of the city. Also, a majority of the rural fire chiefs as well as the county Fire Marshal have backed the ordinance that would "outlaw" BSFD.

H&N - May/June. 1977 - A county ordinance forbidding BSFD from operation has been passed. Alamance County commissioners, voting 3-to-2, adopted an ordinance on April 4 that allowed authorized fire departments to serve the county and thus outlawed unauthorized departments. BCFD was not included in the list of authorized fire departments. (Noted one Commissioner during the voting, "It was an instrument used to get ride of a fire department and I didn't think we [had the authority] as a board could do that." BSFD members are headed back to court, to reclaim their "authority to fight fires." They've been "temporarily forbidden" to fight fires by the new ordinance. The BSFD board has instructed their attorney to file a civil action on their behalf. The attorney will also seek an injunction against enforcement until a decision is reached. "Nearly two years ago, disgruntled members of the Elon College Volunteer Fire Department left to form the Boone Station [Volunteer Fire] Department, fighting fires outside the town of Elon College, an area also served by the town's department."

BDT - Oct. 1, 1977 - Petitions from both sides were denied Friday in county Superior Court, during a preliminary hearing in a suite brought by BSFD against the county commissioners. The suit was filed last week. The firemen contend that their constitutional rights were violated when the commissioners adopted an ordinance in April that allowed only "franchised fire departments" to operate. Presiding was Judge Henry A. McKinnon Jr. Attorneys for BSFD asked that the ordinance not be enforced, pending this trial. The county asked that BSFD not be allowed to operate, pending this trail. Both were denied. Attorneys for the county filed a response to the suit on Wednesday, noting BSFD was in violation of the ordinance. They also contended that their operation was a safety issue, with "danger, confusion, and inefficiencies resulting from the intrusion of competing fire protecting units." One instance was cited in the summer of 1976 when both ECFD and BSFD arrived at the same fire on Coal Chute Road. Further, they noted that a "conflict" occurred between the ECFD firemen and the BSFD firemen, when the latter "appropriated to his own use" the air pack of the Elon College Fire Chief.

H&N - Sep./Oct. 1977 - Asst. County Manager Don C. Flowers Jr. says the county ordinance which recognizes only authorized fire departments to operate in the county will be upheld by court action if necessary. He made the statement after learning that BSFD responded to a call. The department is not recognized by the county, and an ordinance prohibits their operation as they're not considered "official." County Fire Marshal Dave Cauble said that BSFD monitors radio calls, and answered what ended up as a false call on Catherine Drive. The department wasn't dispatched, and arrived after ECFD was on scene. Sheriff's deputies reported taking a complain that BSFD had responded to the call. BSFD stated, through its attorney, that they planned to file suit against the county about the ordinance.

H&N - Jul./Aug. 1978 - A final determination of the legal stations of BSFD is still pending in the Civil Division of Alamance County Superior Court. Meanwhile, members of BSFD are circulating a letter urging people living outside the Elon College corporate limits to vote against a proposed tax-supported fire district. Roy Whitesell is Fire Chief of BSFD. He notes that BSFD was created through the voluntary contributions of rural residents. [ Thus is appears BSFD opposed any taxation, but maybe I'm reading wrong. ] On the town side, Bill Hetzel is Fire Chief of ECFD. He

wants a 2.92 cents per \$100 tax from rural residents, to augment the funds they receive from the town.

H&N - Nov./Dec. 1978 - A court decision has been rendered that prohibits BSFD from operating as a volunteer fire department. They have filed notice of an intention to appeal. The decision was entered by Judge D. Marsh McLell.

[ Boone Station Fire Department ceases operation at some point in late-1978. What happened to their members, equipment, and facility? To be determined. The non-profit corporation, however, was never dissolved. ]

Historical photo from Elon web site, labeled "court ruled in favor of Elon College Fire Department over Boone Station Fire Department. Click to enlarge:



Name: (real name preferred)  
E-mail: (optional)  
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?  
Yes  
No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

**What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?**

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.