

## Remembering Sunday School at Raleigh Fire Stations

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On Sunday November 5, 1967, a service was held at Raleigh Fire Station 1 celebrating the twelve anniversary of the fire department's Sunday school program. The event started at 2:30 p.m. and the program is shown to the right.

The program was started as extension of the Men's Bible Class of the Edenton Street Methodist Church. The first classes were held at Station 1 on November 3, 1955. Nearly nine years later, the classes were also held at Station 5 and Station 7. And would be starting at Station 9 in the summer of 1965.

Other churches assisted with the classes. White Memorial Presbyterian, Hayes Barton Methodist, Hayes Barton Baptist, and St. John's Baptist helped with the classes at Station 5. Longview Baptist was the partner for the programs at Station 7. Emmanuel Baptist would be assisting with the classes at Station 9.

Noted a *Raleigh Times* story on June 20, 1964, four men "not members of the fire department" were play key roles in organizing the original class at Station 1 (and which included firemen from nearby Station 2). The included E. Y. Floyd who was a long time Sunday school teacher, Dr. W. D. Miller who accompanied the singing firemen on the piano, and E. C. Banks who was the group's leader. And Pat Murphy, an insurance underwriter and a member of Edenton Street Methodist Church.

Said of Murphy in the story, he was "perhaps the man most responsible for the formation of the classes" nine years earlier.

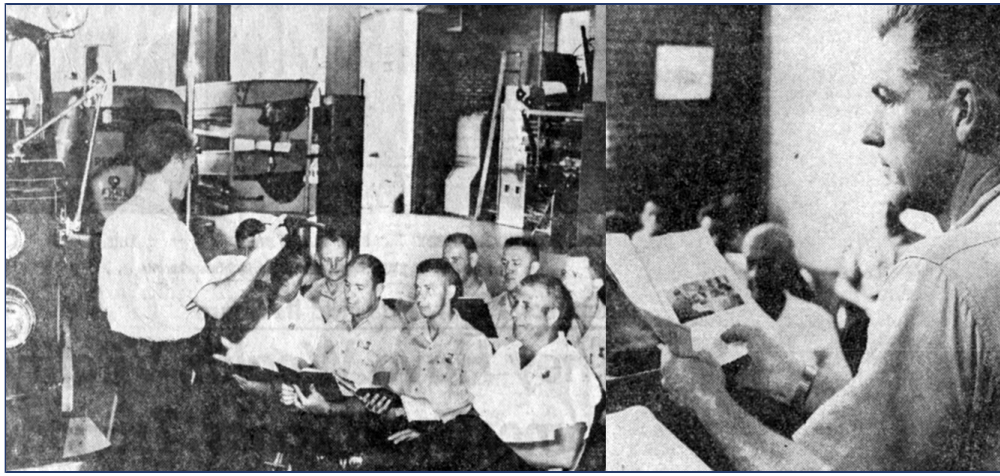
Singing hymns was an important part of each Sunday's service. The fireman sang at least three or four hymns. Said Banks to the newspaper "We certainly don't claim to be professional singers," "[but] we make up with enthusiasm what we might lack in musical skill."

The singing firemen have also made outside appearances as a choral group. Notes the story, they've "sung for North Street Baptist twice and Layden Memorial Methodist a like number of times."

What happens when there's a fire during class? Said Miller, "The firemen slid down the pole right in the middle of class" and then "come back and [resume] the classes when the fire is put out."

Rescue Office Harold Jones, acting President of the class, could recall only one or two times that "school" was interrupted. At least on his shift. (There were two shifts at this time.) And those fires "didn't amount to much." (The other officers for the 1963-64 term were James E. Warren as Vice President, and Jack Barden as Treasurer.) Click to enlarge:

Carolyn Wall.....	C. A. Lloyd
Pianist	Director
Presiding .....	Harold Jones
	Pres. B Shift Sunday School
Invocation .....	Capt. W. R. Mabrey
	No. 2 Fire Station
Hymn No. 291.....	Take Time To Be Holy
Recognition of Guest.....	Chief J. B. Keeter
Presentation of Awards.....	J. A. Bowling
	Pres. A Shift Sunday School
Remarks.....	Chief J. B. Keeter
Hymn No. 377.....	I Will Sing The Wonderous Story
Introduction of Speaker.....	C. R. Puryear
	Assistant Chief
Address.....	Rev. J. Groce Robinson
	Pastor, Longview Baptist Church
Hymn.....	How Great Thou Art
	Mrs. George Pettigrew
	Pianist, No. 7 Fire Station
Benediction.....	E. Y. Floyd
	Sunday School Teacher for No. 1 & 2 Stations
Refreshments.....	No. 1 Station



*Raleigh Times* photos - July 1964 (left) and July 1961 (right)

Offerings are taken during each service and the monies benefit needy Raleigh families. The class members at Station 6 (comprised of firemen from Stations 4, 5, and 6) also donated for a project to fund bible translators for Brazilian Indians. The firemen sent monthly checks to the project coordinators for about three years.

When Floyd was available to act as teacher, firemen served as substitute teachers: Jones, Charles Wood, and Richard Mabry. Three retired firemen continued to attend classes after leaving the department: V. C. Mims, B. A. Edwards, and M. E. Perry.

Noting this important point, Fire Chief Jack Keeter said "the classes haven't jeopardize fire service at all." And "the firemen stay in their own territory when they attend the classes. The trucks are on hand and they are ready to go to the fire when the alarm rings."

There's also been a side benefit to the station-based classes. Firemen who attended on duty invariably attended church service more frequently, and all of which brings members of the fire department closer to each other.

Added Keeter, "When we were talking about [starting] the classes, we wanted to avoid any mockery and fly-by-night aspects." He added "We wanted to run the classes just as they were run in regular churches."

The firefighters have also had a chance to directly "pay back their debt" to Edenton Street Methodist Church. After a devastating fire in 1956, one of the contributions for rebuilding came from the fire department.

Additional notes, from a *Raleigh Times* story three years earlier on July 29, 1961:

- Sunday school classes were held weekly.
- Crews from Station 2 (Memorial Auditorium), Station 3 (East Street), Station 4 (Jefferson Street), and Station 5 (Oberlin Road) attended classes at their station.
- However those working at Station 8 (Method Road) were unable to attend, as their station was too far from Stations 1, 6, or 7.
- Said Asst. Chief J. M. Burner, Raleigh and Greensboro were the only cities in the south with such organized services. Greensboro firemen started theirs several months earlier.
- Classes at Station 6 started in 1956. Classes at Station 7 started on March 3, 1961.
- Earl Wilborn was the teacher at Station 6 and Ray Beckler was the teacher at Station 7.
- The pianists were the aforementioned Dr. Miller, Ed Cullom, and Mrs. Inez Bailey.
- Often the firemen had visitors, from individuals (most common) to entire classes from other churches.
- Families of those on-duty were also frequent visitors.
- Said Capt. Oscar Summers at Station, the public was cordially invited. Though attendance averaged about ten, there was room for fifty.
- And for those who hate going home after church and having to cook, the firemen do the same thing. "No later than thirty minutes after Sunday school, the water was boiling for the corn."

Sources:

- *Raleigh Times*, July 29, 1961.
- *Raleigh Times*, June 20, 1964.
- Twelfth anniversary program, November 5, 1967.