

Asheville and Buncombe County Ambulance Service and Rescue Squad History

Research notes by Mike Legeros

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Before 1960

1956, Feb 05 – Snapshot. Ambulance service is provided by several funeral homes. All have at least one “straight ambulance” and most have at least two others that are combination hearse-ambulances. The “regular ambulance personnel” are trained in “Red Cross first aid methods.” There are some 15 ambulances total that are available in the event of a disaster. [ACT, 2/5/56]

1957 - Listed in the Miller’s City Directory of 1957 under Ambulance Service were:

- Allen-Birchette Funeral Home, 350 Southside Avenue
- Berryman Funeral Home, 138 Charlotte
- Dunn & Williams Funeral Home, 57 N. Spruce
- Groce Funeral Home, 1155 Haywood Road
- Memorial Mission Hospital
- Morris-Hendon-Black Funeral Home, 140 Merrimon Avenue

1957, Apr 20 - **Enka Rescue Squad** operating by this time. [ACT, 4/20/57]

1960 to 1964

1961, Feb 27 – **Barnardsville Rescue Squad** organized by this time as an extension of Barnardsville VFD. Sponsored by the Buncombe County Civile Defense unit. Operated a rescue truck purchased by the county. [AT, 2/27/61]

1961, Feb 27 – **Weaverville Rescue Squad** organized as an extension of Weaverville VFD. Operated a rescue truck purchased by the county. [AT, 2/27/61]

1961, Feb 27 – **Skyland Rescue Squad** organized as an extension of Skyland VFD. Sponsored by the Buncombe County Civile Defense unit. Operated a rescue truck purchased by the county. [ACT, 2/27/61, 7/4/65]

1962, Jan 25 – **Black Mountain Rescue Squad** operating by this time. Extension of the fire department. [ACT, 1/25/62]

1962, Jul – **Buncombe County Rescue Squad** organized. From a profile on August 1964, they were the only rescue squad that was not “an auxiliary unit of a volunteer fire

department.” The eight VFDs with squads were “Beaverdam, Black Mountain, Fairview, Barnardsville, Weaverville, Skyland, West Buncombe, and Upper Hominy.” BCRS had two ambulances, a jeep and trailer, and a rescue boat. They had a membership limit of 50 men at any time, with four squads of members. They were located on Hansel Avenue, and wanted to build a four-bay building on the property to house vehicles. [ACT, 8/2/64]

1963, Jan 15 – News reported that a joint city-county rescue squad was proposed on Monday to county commissioners, and by redirect funds currently allocated to the Junior [Sheriff’s] Deputy League. [ACT, 1/15/63]

1964, Mar 23 – **Beaverdam Rescue Squad** operating by this time. Extension of the fire department. [ACT, 3/23/64]

1964, Mar 23 – **Fairview Rescue Squad** operating by this time. Extension of the fire department. [ACT, 3/23/64]

1964, Dec 31 – **Upper Hominy Rescue Squad** operating by this time. Extension of the fire department. [ACT, 12/31/64]

1965 to 1969

1965, May – Six funeral homes in Buncombe County announced they will cease emergency ambulance service to the general public at midnight on June 30, along with five other homes in Haywood and Madison counties. They said they had been losing money for years by providing the service. [ACT, 5/11/65]

1965, May 27? – City council adopted an emergency ordinance establishing standards and regulations for future ambulance operations. [ACT, 5/28/65]

1965, Jun 4? – City council authorized a contract with Ambulance Service of Charlotte to start ambulance service on July 1. [ACT, 6/4/65]

1965, June 18 – News reports that the change from funeral home ambulance services to a city-county ambulance service had been postponed to September 1. The provider reported that new equipment had been delayed from the manufacturers. [ACT, 6/18/65]

1965, Sep 1- Two funeral homes continued operating ambulance services, Berryman-Hall Funeral Home and Jesse Ray Funeral Home. [AT, 8/11/66]

1965, Sep 4 – News reports that rules and regulations for granting ambulance franchise in the county have been established. However, no franchises had yet been awarded. [ACT, 9/4/65]

1965, Sep 11? – **Asheville Ambulance Service Inc.** started operation on Friday of/before September 11, 1965. Headquarters at 384 Merrimon Avenue. Managed by Ken Ashley. Four vehicles in the fleet, each equipped with two-way radio. Phone number for dispatcher was 254-3537. In the first month, it answered 165 calls in city and 42 in county. [ACT, 10/19/65; AC 9/11/65]

1965, Dec – Berryman-Hall Funeral Home certified to provide ambulance service. [AC, 12/3/65]

1966, Aug 14 – News reports that a five-person advisory committee appointed by city council to make recommendations on ambulance service asked that an Asheville FD captain be placed in charged to “getting the operation underway,” that he handle the duties for 60 to 90 days, and that an old fire station on Tunnel Road be used as headquarters. [AC, 8/14/66]

1966, Aug 16 – County commissioners gave informal approval to a new city-county ambulance service. Two ambulances would be assigned to the south and west sections of the county, where after September 1 there would be no other service, and two others would remain inside the city limits. [ACT, 8/16/66]

1966, Sep 1 – Ambulance Asheville Service ceased operations. They announced plans to stop operating on August 11. The company had been operating at a loss since it started, due to requirements to maintain 24-hour-service and salary costs including new federal minimum wage laws, as well as failure of patients to pay bills. They had a fleet of four ambulances and a staff of about twelve. [ACT, 08/11/66, 10/28/66]

1966, Sep 1 - **Asheville-Buncombe County Ambulance Department** started operation at 12:01 a.m. They had four new ambulances stationed at four locations: Central Fire Station, West Asheville fire station, Tunnel Road ABCAD headquarters (two ambulances), and Skyland VFD. Their phone number was the same as the old firm. They charged a flat rate of \$20 per transport. They had hired several full-time employees, including men from the former providers. Most were moonlighting fire and policemen. Still also operating included West Funeral Home in Weaverville, and Berryman-Hall Funeral Home in the city. [??, 8/31/66]

1966, Sep 1 – Director named for ABCAD, Jack Leatherwood, chief of Black Mountain FD. [ACT, 9/1/66]

1966, Oct 25? – ABCAD provided report to county commissioners on activities. Toal \$26,669 had been spent on equipment, including six ambulances, a station wagon for the director that can also transport injured people, and radio and other equipment. Five new

van-type ambulances were purchased, along with a used ambulance for non-emergency calls. They answered 483 calls in the first seven weeks. [ACT, 10/25/66]

1967, Jan 1 – News reports that a ABACD ambulance was heavily damaged in a collision with a car at Merrimon Avenue and Annadale Drive on the Saturday on/before that date. Six people were injured, none seriously. [ACT, 1/1/67]

1967, Dec 7 – **Sibbett Cab and Ambulance Service** in Swannanoa operating by this time. [AC, 3/7/67]

1964, Feb 25 – **Reems Creek Rescue Squad** operating by this time. Extension of the fire department? [ACT, 2/25/68]

1976, Dec 31 – **Swannanoa Rescue Squad** operating by this time. Extension of the fire department? [ACT, 12/31/76]

1968, Mar – Black Mountain FD/RS operating an ambulance by this time. [??] [AC, 3/12/68]

1968, Jul 1 – County took over sole responsibility for ambulance service, now named **Buncombe County Ambulance Service**. Jack Leatherwood was appointed as director, returning to the role to replace Edward M. Janes. The change was enacted to compile with a new state statue that placed responsibility for ambulance service to county governments. [AC, 7/2/68]

1969, Sep 19 – News reported that BCAS would relocate to the courthouse in the next two weeks. The move would save \$250 per month in rent, paid to occupy the old fire station on Tunnel Road. BCAS will be temporarily located in the former off the county attorney on the sixth floor, and later be moved to the third floor. BCAS now had six ambulances, and two housed on Tunnel Road. One would be transferred to the Oakley fire station and the other to Williams Funeral Home or the Beverly Hills fire station. [ACT, 9/19/67]

1970s

1970, Jan – Snapshot. BCRS has two ambulances, a one-ton panel heavy rescue truck, a four-door truck for transporting men and equipment, a four-wheel driver former Army weapons carrier, and a four-wheel drive Jeep, and a pick-up truck. [ACT, 1/25/70]

1970, Dec – West's Funeral Home in Weaverville ended ambulance service. [ACT, 12/20/70]

1970, Feb 10 – News reported that four new ambulances would be purchased by BCAS from a federal grant. They expected to be delivered and operating by March 1. [AC, 2/10/70]

1970, Jul – Snapshot. BCAS answered 3,800 calls during the last fiscal year. The service has 11 full-time and 39 part-time workers. [ACT, 7/2/70]

1971, Mar 3 – Three new ambulances placed to go into service on Thursday. A fourth ambulance, for backup, has been loaded from Black Mountain Rescue Squad. [AC, 3/3/71]

1972 – Jerry VeHaun hired as BCAS director. [ACT, 11/15/92]

1972, Dec – Upper Hominy Rescue and Ambulance Service operating by this time. It may have been operated as a function of the fire department. [ACT, 12/28/72]

1973, May 9 – BCAS ambulance overturned on US 25 in Skyland. Damage was estimated at \$500 to \$600. [AC, 5/9/73]

1973, Sep 19 – News reported that county officials revised and raised ambulance fees. [AC, 9/19/73]

1974, Aug 9 – News reported that a relocation project was underway, moving BCAS from the third floor of the courthouse to the basement of the Health and Welfare Building, along with building an EOC at the location. [ACT, 8/9/74]

1974, Sep 30 – News reported on BCAS ambulance accident. Collided with a car on Patton Avenue near Bear Creek Road. The ambulance driver was injured. The ambulance was heavily damaged. [ACT, 9/30/74]

1975, Feb 7 – News reported that BCAS restructuring was in the work, with 20 to 30 part-time jobs to be eliminated in favor of full-time employees. Currently had 16 full-time and 43 part-time employees. New structure would have 35 full-time on three-shifts, plus another 10 or 12 certified EMTs as part-time. [AT, 2/7/75; ACT, 2/8/75]

1976, Feb 6 – Two new “van-type” ambulances delivered, replacing two “station-wagon style”. BCAS had seven vehicles. Each cost \$12, 949. [ACT, 2/6/76]

1976, Jun 9 – By this time, BCAS has been renamed **Buncombe County Emergency Medical Services**. [AT, 6/9/76]

1976, Jun 28 – **Riceville Rescue Squad** operating by this time. Extension of the fire department? [ACT, 6/28/76]

1976, Sep 22 – News reported that Reynolds VFD placed a new \$15,127 ambulance in service. The county paid for half, and the state funded the rest. [ACT, 9/2/76]

1978, May 7 – Snapshot. BCAS medics have been training to upgrade from EMT to EMT-I. They have seven ambulances at BCAS HQ, the West Asheville fire station, Black Mountain VFD, Reynolds VFD, Skyland VFD, Enka VFD, and Weaver VFD. In addition, thirteen county fire departments operating ambulances. [ACT, 5/7/78]

1979, Mar 27 – By this time, a BCEMS ambulance is stationed at Black Mountain VFD. [ACT, 4/27/79]

1980s

1982, spring – First paramedics for BCEMS. Joint program with Memorial Mission Hospital, Asheville-Buncombe Technical College, and BCEMS. The first group had 12 medics. [AT, 3/4/82]

1982, Aug – Snapshot. BCRS operates four rescue trucks and two ambulances. Their headquarters is in West Asheville at Hansel and Clayton avenues. They do not charge for ambulance transport, but are considering implementing a \$25 fee. [AT, 8/8/82]

1982, Oct 6 – News reports that county officials were debating whether they should regulate the growth of private ambulance companies. Two private companies had applied by a franchise. Currently **Penland and Sons Ambulance Service** was the sole franchise owner in the county. [AC, 10/6/82]

1983, May 20 – Snapshot. County ambulance fees are \$45 per trip and are proposed to be raised to \$55 for the upcoming fiscal year. BCEMS expects to make about 10,000 ambulance runs in the coming year. The increased revenue would be used to pay for 15 new paramedics. [AC, 5/20/82]

1983, Jan 19 – News reports that city firefighters were learning CPR as part of a first responder program. [TBD, 1/19/83]

1983, May 18 – News reports that a new ambulance franchise ordinance was being drafted that required all private ambulances operating in the county to be licensed by the county and meet minimum standards. One private ambulance service was critical of the new ordinance, that required two certified EMTs be present on all non-emergency calls. [AC, 1/19/83, 5/18/83]

1983, Nov 2 – News reports that Penland and Sons Ambulance Service, a division of the funeral home, was awarded an ambulance franchise on Tuesday. [AC, 11/2/83]

1983, Dec 31 – Snapshot. BCEMS responded to 11,420 calls during the year, 5,723 that were emergency calls. Total of 8,509 transport calls. BCEMS has seven ambulance stations, 55 employees and a 10-member reserve team. [AC, 1/12/84]

1984, Jan 1 – Buncombe County Rescue Squad renamed as **Asheville Area Rescue Squad**. The squad had 26 members that responded to vehicle extrications, water rescue, first responder calls, and major fires. The name change was made to reduce confusion of their squad with BCEMS. [ACT, 1/2/84]

1984, Jan 31 – News reports that county's sixth paramedic unit was active in Enka on Monday. It's housed at the American Enka Company fire station. [AC, 1/31/84]

1986, Apr? – Memorial Mission Medical Center air ambulance program started operating. [AC, 10/5/85]

1988, May 14? – BCEMS ambulance collided with car on I-240 near Merrimon Avenue exit. No injuries. [ACT, 5/15/88]

1988, Jul 9 – News reports Asheville FD start responding to medical calls on Friday, as some two-thirds of firefighters have been certified as EMTs. [AC, 7/9/88]

1989, May 1 – News reports new county Enhanced 911 telephone system goes in service on Monday. [AC, 5/1/91]

1990s

1991, Sep 12? – BCEMS ambulance struck by pick-up truck on Rathfarnham Road at Sweet Creek Road. Four people were injured, three in the truck and one paramedic. [AC, 9/13/91]

1995, Jan 4 – News reports county commissioners approved a plan to allow volunteers to work with BCEMS, as a cost-savings measure. [AC, 1/4/95]

1997, Feb 05 – Citation of ambulance fee increase from \$200 to \$300. [ACT, 2/5/97]

1998, Jul 27? – LODD. Samuel McElarth, killed while riding in a Mission St. Joseph's Hospital ambulance, after struck by a train in Swannanoa. [ACT, 7/28/98]

2000s

2000 – Asheville Area Rescue Squad renamed **Buncombe County Rescue Squad**. [NCSOS]

2011, Aug 1 – Ambulance fee increase of \$100 took effect. [ACT, 7/26/00]

2018, Feb 14 – News reports that county commissioners approved an ambulance fee increase, the first since 2011. [MX, 2/14/18]

2021, Aug – Community Paramedic pilot program announced by county.