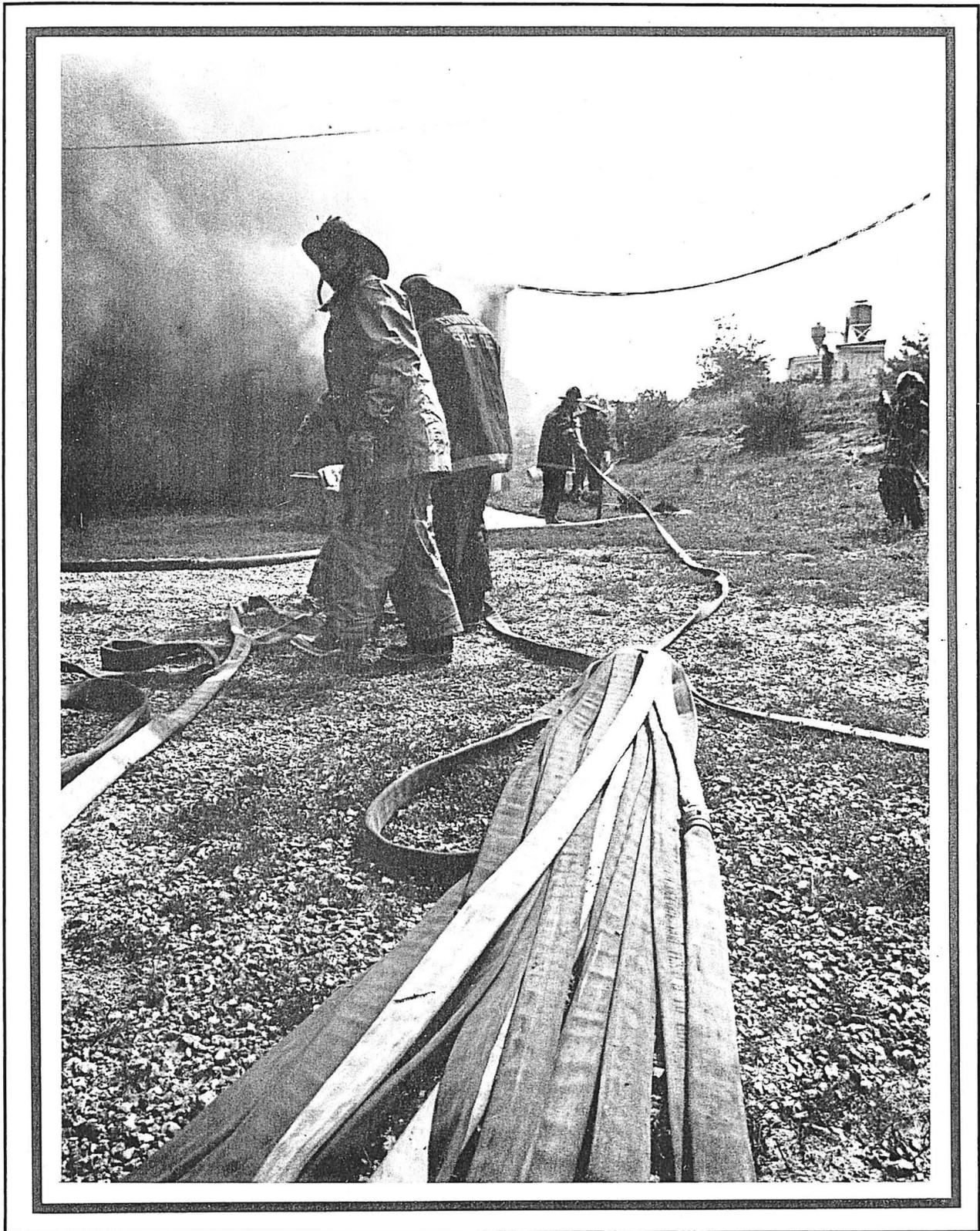


1958 - 1988



**Thirty Years of
Firefighting in Catawba County**

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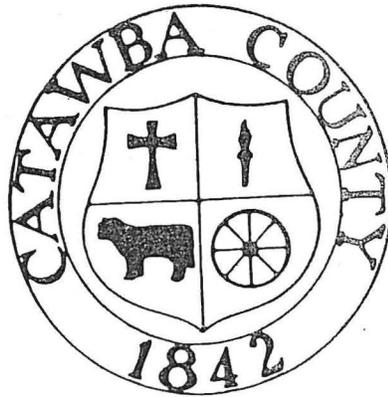
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THE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS OF CATAWBA COUNTY
April, 1988

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THE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS OF CATAWBA COUNTY

By Kathy D. Kluttz*

This year, 1988, marks the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of rural fire districts in Catawba County. During this period, twelve rural and seven municipal departments have evolved. With county support, the once struggling volunteer firefighting units have blossomed into modern facilities with technologically advanced equipment.

But the tremendous strides taken were not without struggle. As the county grew, Commissioners were faced with the problem of providing adequate fire protection to all citizens. After fifteen years of trials and tribulations, Commissioners arrived at a solution. The answer they found was fire district taxation. From this time forward, volunteer firefighting units, aided by county assistance, rapidly developed into a superior county fire service equalled only by the dedicated volunteers who were responsible for its excellence.

THE EARLY DAYS

Like civilization, the art of firefighting evolved over the centuries. From ancient Roman to modern American times, firefighters have always sought to preserve life and property.

In Catawba County, firefighting can be traced to a Hickory Bucket Brigade formed in 1878. Newton citizens formed their own brigade called the Newton Fire Company in approximately 1886, while Claremont residents established a brigade when the town was chartered in 1893.

The method of firefighting used by each group of volunteers was similar. In Hickory, citizens kept a bucket in their homes. When a fire alarm sounded, they grabbed their bucket and ran to the fire scene. Volunteers from Newton were fortunate enough to own a hook and ladder wagon which was manually pushed to the fire scene or hitched to a mare. Alarms ranged from ringing a courthouse bell or tooting a mill whistle in Newton, to banging on a pan in Claremont. After they arrived at the fire scene, volunteers and community members formed a line from the well to the fire and passed the water-filled buckets directly to the fire's edge. Water was thrown directly on the fire, and the bucket was discarded or sent back to the well to be refilled.

A group of volunteers, known as the "rescue group" organized to fight Hickory fires in 1882. The group purchased buckets and ladders, and stored them on a wagon which was manually pushed to the fire scene, unless a horse could be found. The volunteers collected rain water, and stored it in cisterns strategically located around the city.

City water works usually had a profound effect on firefighting in the early days. Volunteers in Hickory requested that the city establish a water system.

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In 1905, one year before city water works were completed, volunteers officially organized the first Hickory Fire Department. A horse and wagon were purchased for the unit, and a second horse was added several years later. When Newton installed a city water system and organized in approximately 1907, the bucket brigades were replaced with two-wheeled reel carts. Hose was attached to the reels which were manually pulled to the fire scene. Town records indicate unorganized volunteers fought fire using hand-operated wheelers in the 1920s in Conover. Claremont did not complete their water system until 1939. Although a two-wheeled cart was purchased at that time, it remained in use for only a year before a truck was acquired.

As the country reaped the benefits of improved transportation, so did the volunteer firefighters. The City of Hickory was the first to purchase a motorized truck with pumper for their department in approximately 1913. Another pumper was added in 1918, and a third in 1926. The Town of Maiden organized a fire department in 1921, and purchased its first vehicle, a Model-T Ford, in the following year. Newton obtained a 1919 American LaFrance pumper in 1920. In the early 1930s, unorganized Conover volunteers fastened a hose to a town-owned garbage truck.

The Catawba Volunteer Fire Department, formed in 1937, acquired a 1936 chain-driven wooden-spoked truck, which gave volunteers constant problems. In Conover, a volunteer force was officially organized in 1942 when a new Ford pumper arrived.

Fire departments entered a critical stage of their development as World War II began. Firemen, true to their voluntary spirit, left home to join the war effort. In Catawba, the membership roster was reduced since no other man in the town was available for firefighting. The Chief and Treasurer left for the war as well. Because of a metal shortage which resulted from the war, Maiden could not obtain a new fire truck. The volunteers accepted their plight and continued to push off their old 1920s truck to get it cranked.

When the post-war boom sounded across America, Catawba County Commissioners heard it loudly. Growth in population, commercialization, and industrialization created increased demands from all Catawba County citizens for more adequate fire protection. Finding a final solution to these problems would take another twenty-five years.

THE COUNTY STEPS IN

Prior to 1952, the only fire protection accorded citizens in the rural areas of Catawba County was provided by the five area municipal fire departments - Hickory, Newton, Maiden, Catawba, and Conover. Oftentimes, the fire coverage rendered by these units, concerned primarily with the protection of residents within their own city limits, was inadequate because of the response time required to reach rural areas and lack of equipment. As the pressing need for rural fire protection became more apparent, the County stepped in and took action.

During early 1952, Catawba County Commissioners together with the Hickory City Council discussed the purchase of a fire truck for rural fire protection. The City would buy a fire truck with funds already on hand, and the County would then purchase the truck from them on an annual installment plan. Following completion of payment, the equipment would become the property of Catawba County and be used as the county deemed fit. The County agreed to pay the city \$75 for each call answered outside of city limits. The truck would be available for all rural areas in the county, but only after closer municipal units had first been requested. Hickory could answer city fire calls with the new truck if their own trucks were inadequate for the purpose, but only when the truck was not in rural use.

The newly formulated plan first appeared several months before a deadline set by the City of Hickory on the use of a 1918 fire truck. On April 12, 1952, the old inadequate truck would no longer be used to answer rural fire calls.

When residents throughout the county heard of the proposed plan, they were infuriated. If the county wanted to provide fire protection they reasoned, coverage should be provided for all 17,500 rural residents of Catawba County - not just for those residing in areas surrounding the Hickory township. Marvin Fisher, a Long Island resident, stated, "It isn't fair to talk of one group getting fire protection and not all the people."¹ Newspaper editorials suggested, as a solution to the problem, the establishment of a fire commission to decide where to most advantageously place fire equipment throughout the County.

But from the commissioners' perspective, citizens failed to see the rationale behind the probable agreement with Hickory. The rural fire truck would be placed at the Hickory Fire Department since at least one-half of County taxpayers resided in the surrounding area. The remaining residents were asked to first call other municipalities for service because they were often closer to the fire scene than Hickory firefighters, not because commissioners wished to limit the use of the new rural fire truck.

Complaints of residents throughout the county did not, however, fall on deaf ears. County commissioners assured the citizenry at a Board Meeting held on March 3, 1952, that any plan adopted for one area of the county would have county-wide application. A contract confirming the Hickory-based protection with a county-financed truck was signed in mid-1952.

Already county residents were beginning to take the actions necessary for their own fire protection. The Balls Creek Grange met in July, 1952, and appointed a committee of citizens from every area of the county to create a fire protection plan suitable for all County citizens. Several months later, the North Carolina Commissioner of Insurance called a statewide conference to address new developments in fire service to citizens. The program was designed "to enable

¹"Rural Folk Not Confused Over Fire Truck Proposal," Newton Observer. March 10, 1952.

all governmental units to catch up with the people." ²

The County signed a contract with Newton in January, 1953, similar to the one entered into with Hickory. Under terms of the contract, the county purchased a city Ford truck for rural use on the installment plan, and continued to pay the city \$75 for each rural call answered.

The Town Board of Claremont met during the same time, and decided that new equipment could not be financed solely by a County-paid fee of \$75 per rural call. The Claremont Fire Department had only a pick-up truck which could carry a fire hose, but not a water supply.

The Long View Volunteer Fire Department, established in 1952, observed the County's generosity to the other municipalities. The Mayor of the town appeared before the County Board of Commissioners in March, 1953, and requested \$1730 for the purchase of hose for their only old truck. The commissioners took the request under advisement.

Commissioners appointed a fire study committee which formulated detailed recommendations concerning the problem of fire protection. Their findings, based on a county-wide survey of structures and roads, revealed increased urbanization and population in areas surrounding the towns of Catawba County. The committee's final report, released in January of 1953, suggested the County retain a building inspector to help prevent fires. The committee further advised that the County enter into contracts with municipalities similar to the agreement with Hickory. In keeping with the latest legislation, the committee recommended a petition be submitted to rural voters for the purpose of levying a fire tax to support fire protection and prevention. Finally, the report called for the establishment of three completely rural volunteer firefighting units equipped with one paid engineer-driver in the Propst Crossroads, Terrell, and Oxford School areas. Sadly enough, many of the farsighted proposals would wait another decade for implementation.

Maiden became the third municipality to enter a contract with the county. Mayor Banks Whisnant requested the county purchase an existing 1945 fire truck for \$6000 and pay for it on the installment plan. His request was granted in June of 1953. The town also received a \$75 payment from the county for each rural fire call. Shortly thereafter, Catawba and Claremont agreed to similar arrangements with the County.

In 1956, the Newton Observer printed a map and description of municipal fire districts drafted by County Planning Engineer, Charles Davis, Jr. The "response districts" were created to alleviate the duplication of service and payment by the County. Since residents were unsure of just which fire department to call when a fire occurred, they frequently notified two or more stations. Since the county paid \$75 to each municipality for every call

²"Rural Fire Protection to be Conference Topic." Newton Observer. October 9, 1952.

answered, unnecessary expenses mounted until districts were firmly understood by residents. The districts approved by the Board of Commissioners included: 1) Long View 2) Hickory 3) Conover 4) Claremont 5) Newton 6) Catawba and 7) Maiden. (See map.) But the duplication did not disappear until rural firefighting units emerged several years later.

THE BIRTH OF RURAL FIREFIGHTING UNITS

Rural fire protection continued to be provided by county-financed municipal departments until a single announcement by the Hickory changed the face of firefighting in Catawba County for years to come. Because of insurance rating difficulties, the City of Hickory gave notice in 1956 that it would discontinue fire service to rural residents after its contract with the County expired on June 30, 1957.

Residents of the Viewmont, St. Stephens, and Fairbrook areas who had always enjoyed Hickory fire protection were suddenly faced with no fire coverage and increased insurance rates. They immediately took action and began to plan for the organization of rural volunteer fire departments in their areas. They were assisted by Earl Moser, Harry Yount, and Jim Tate of the Hickory Fire Department. These men continued to aid other developing departments in training and organization.

Under the guidance of Tom DeRhodes, Viewmont Fire Department No. 1 became the County's first entirely rural volunteer fire department. The organization began service on July 1, 1957, with a 1952 County-pumper transferred from the Hickory Department. St. Stephens Fire Department No. 2 followed and began operations on January 1, 1958, while Fairbrook Fire Department No. 3 initiated service in early July of the same year. With the organization of each additional department, these firemen were responsible for less fire coverage than before.

In the fall of 1961, residents from the Mountain View and Propst Crossroads communities met to discuss the organization of a fire department for both areas. Because of the tremendous territory involved, each community resolved to organize separate departments. Mountain View Fire Department No. 4 became operational on November 5, 1963, and Propst Crossroads Department No. 5 started servicing the community at approximately the same time. At last citizens had followed directives of the 1953 fire study commission which called for the placement of a rural fire department in the Propst Crossroads area.

Four new rural departments were organized in the 1960s. They included Bandys Volunteer Fire Department, organized in 1962 and operational in January, 1964; Oxford Volunteer Fire Department, organized in February, 1967 and operational in August, 1968; Cooksville Volunteer Fire Department, organized in August, 1967; and Sherrills Ford-Terrell, organized in September, 1969 and operational in April, 1972.

But county residents did not stop here. They organized new departments until

all areas were provided with adequate fire coverage and reduced insurance premiums. In the 1970s and early 1980s, three new volunteer departments were created: St. Timothy, chartered in March 1971, operational in July, 1972, and since recognized as Conover Fire Department No. 2; Maiden Rural Fire Department, organized approximately 1974, and formerly part of the Maiden Volunteer Fire Department; and finally Startown, established district boundaries in March, 1980, and became operational in July of the same year.

Each of the rural volunteer fire departments was created through the hard work and dedication of firemen and their community. Land, labor, and building supplies for new fire houses were supplied by the community in many cases. Overwhelming financial support poured from the pockets of residents. Fund raisers, held by firemen together with their Ladies Auxiliaries, provided money for operating expenses during the lean early years of the departments. Several departments still hold annual fund raisers to supplement their fire tax income. The Oxford and Catawba Fire Departments sponsor annual fish fries, the Mountain View and Cooksville Departments hold annual barbecues, while the Startown and Propst Departments create haunted houses.

DISTRICT FIRE TAXATION

The communities of Catawba County have chosen to finance their volunteer fire departments through district fire tax levies. Since departments no longer need to beg for money, all have obtained the equipment necessary to run a successful operation. A healthy competition among district departments has evolved because of their financial security, a competition which has made possible the creation of one of the finest county organizations in the state. During interviews, most fire chiefs stress that their department is the best in the County. Each department implies it has newer or better equipment and manpower than the next. But the passage of time and fire taxes had to occur before the volunteer organizations were able to reach this plateau.

As the first rural fire departments were created, the Catawba County Commissioners authorized County Planning Engineer Charles Davis Jr. to draft a resolution which would provide financial support to rural fire departments. The resolution allowed the county to pay each department \$75 per fire call answered outside of a one-half mile radius of the fire station. Residents living outside of the one-half mile radius were still expected to support their fire department through donations. Furthermore, the resolution also established a fire commission which supervised minimal standards for each rural organization.

Yet County contributions did little to remove the monetary burdens faced by most of the fledgling departments. Over an eight month period in 1959/1960, Viewmont received only \$225, while Fairbrook accumulated \$2250, and St. Stephens, \$2475. Although St. Stephens was satisfied with the plan, Fairbrook, and to a lesser extent Viewmont, wanted to more equally distribute the financial burdens of the fire department.

Firemen turned to a 1951 North Carolina Statute for assistance with their monetary problems. The law states that any territory can petition the county board of commissioners for a local election to permit a special tax levy for local fire protection. Fairbrook was the first department to chose this course of action. They called a meeting of the County Commissioners, Planning Board, and rural fire department representatives in 1960 to ask how to best proceed with an election for district tax support. All present conceded that, according to state law, commissioners must call an election if 15% of district voters signed a petition for the purpose of levying such a tax.

The main objection to a district fire tax came from County Manager George Wilkinson. He wondered if the amount of revenue realized from a district tax would offset the administrative cost of collecting it.

Only one consensus was reached by the three rural fire departments represented at the 1960 meeting. They would maintain control of their own destiny by retaining control of their operations.

Fairbrook, undeterred by the less than unanimous approval of their undertaking, submitted a petition to the county with the required signatures necessary to call a district election. In the fall of 1960, the Fairbrook community became the first to approve a district tax levy for firefighting purposes.

The debate over a county-wide versus individual district tax continued. As early as 1953, a fire study committee appointed by County Commissioners had recommended a county-wide vote to levy a fire tax. Viewmont minutes revealed County officials continued to promote a county-wide tax in July of 1964. Yet Viewmont firemen, because of their strained financial position, resolved to proceed with a petition which called for a fire tax levy. Viewmont residents approved the measure on November 24, 1965, and the community became the second in the County to adopt a district fire tax.

The fire tax problem was still unresolved in the early 1970s. During a February, 1971, meeting, Catawba County Commissioners requested that the County Board of Fire Directors, established in 1969, be reactivated to initiate plans for a county-wide fire tax.

Highly charged emotions emerged from a meeting held several months later between fire department representatives and County Commissioners. The more populous and industrialized fire districts did not favor a county-wide fire tax, while the smaller, less populated districts advocated it. St. Stephens, densely populated and commercialized area, explained that they did not want to pay firefighting costs for other departments. If a countywide tax passed, it "would give St. Stephens the short end of the stick." Therefore, the department initiated plans for a district tax election, and were assisted by Fire Marshal David A. Yount.

Support for the county-wide tax began to decline. The County Manager stated he would be in favor of a county-wide fire tax only if it could be equally distributed. Since an arrangement of this sort was impossible, he stated he could not support it.

Alternative methods of financing fire protection were studied. In April, 1972, Fire Marshal Yount reported he had written Rowan County Commissioners and asked for permission to reprint their study of fire tax financing. At the same time, the Catawba County Firemen's Association decided they would not pursue county wide fire taxation. Finally, in January of 1973, County Commissioners announced they, too, had dropped the idea and were supporting individual fire tax districts.

Rural departments saw the merits of individual fire district taxes, and followed the drift of public opinion. On March 31, 1973, the Bandys, Claremont, Maiden Rural, Oxford, Sherrills Ford, St. Stephens and St. Timothy communities approved fire taxes for their districts.

All existing rural organizations had adopted the district fire tax. Municipal departments had followed suit since they had received directives from the state informing them that it was unlawful to use municipal monies to fund rural firefighting costs. Eventually, the rural fire districts of Long View, Newton, Catawba, and Startown were approved by the Board of Commissioners as service tax districts. The tax rate of these areas was set by the Catawba County Commissioners.

The Denver district, based in Lincoln County, includes fifteen square miles of Catawba County and serves 1379 tracts of land with 424 households. The department offered the County fire protection for the area near Lake Norman before the implementation of fire taxes, therefore the area is not taxed in Catawba County. It is, however, taxed in Lincoln County. In addition to community donations, Catawba County pays Denver \$100 per call. Denver is the only area of the County paid on a per call basis. The amount never runs over \$2400 a year - the amount distributed by the county to each local fire department for mutual aid services.

The Icard District, which originates in Burke County, includes less than ten square miles in the Mt. View and Long View areas. It covers 136 tracts of land with 63 households. The area is taxed and the revenues are received by the Icard Fire Department.

The fire taxes of each department have fluctuated over the years from a low of \$.01 per \$100 valuation to a high of \$.12. The average current fire tax rate appears to be approximately \$.035 per \$100 valuation. As departments complete plans to lower insurance rates by improving water supplies, equipment, and training, tax rates should continue to drop. When the organizations no longer have to play "catch-up," they can start budgeting for the future. Long range planning should also mean reduced fire taxation for districts, so many departments have already taken such measures.

Reduced fire insurance premiums for residents were one of the motivating factors in the establishment of new rural fire districts. Most completely rural fire districts maintain an insurance classification (ISO rating) of 9, although many of the formerly rural departments now work in conjunction with municipalities and have access to their services and water systems. Therefore, their insurance rates are lower.

At present, each fire district covers a four to five mile radius, so additional districts should not be needed in the future. However, the nationwide trend of consolidation forebodes the elimination of some departments in the distant future. A study conducted by the National League of Cities revealed an abundance of over duplication of stations, manpower, and equipment. Duplication, they say, must be eliminated between communities and county. "Annexation, consolidation, or contractual agreements must be made to bring about better service at a saving to the public."³

The Catawba County Volunteer Fire Departments appear to have met the obstacles associated with growth. The City of Conover annexed some of the St. Timothy tax base in 1982. The result was a consolidation of the St. Timothy and Conover Fire Volunteer Fire Departments. Hickory annexed portions of the Viewmont, Fairbrook, St. Stephens, and Mt. View Volunteer Fire Departments in the mid-1980s. Contractual agreements between the City of Hickory and two of these County departments, Mt. View and St. Stephens, benefited all.

Viewmont and Fairbrook Volunteer Fire Departments entered into merger/contracts with the City of Hickory which yielded particularly fruitful outcomes. Hickory saves expenditures on manpower and equipment. The two volunteer departments are reimbursed for their lost tax base, given additional full-time manpower, and furnished with new fire stations. Furthermore, the Hickory Department responds to all structural calls with a fire truck and extends water lines throughout these communities resulting in reduced insurance premiums for residents. Several municipalities have also entered into agreements with rural areas to provide fire service without a duplication of manpower or equipment.

THE CATAWBA COUNTY FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION
AND COUNTY FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

Representatives from six rural fire departments met with seven Catawba County municipal fire departments to organize the Catawba County Firemen's Association on March 31, 1962. The purpose of the new association was to coordinate the activities of all rural and municipal fire departments in a more efficient manner, to work as a liaison between firefighters and governmental agencies, to assist departments in securing firefighting equipment, to maintain a permanent fire school, and to secure benefits for firemen and their families. The Board of Directors for the association consists of two firemen from each department in the County. They control the management, business, and affairs of the association, and make recommendations and suggestions to the membership regarding activities of the association. General membership is limited to firemen of the various departments in Catawba County and auxiliary members interested in promoting the work of the association. Officers for the membership are elected, and the President serves as Chairman of the Board.

³Raymond L. Bancroft, National League of Cities Research Report: Municipal Fire Service Trends. 1972

The association's first president was Dr. C.P. Kyles, and the first order of business was to submit a proposal for a county wide communications system to County Commissioners for approval and purchase. A committee, headed by Tom DeRhodes, was appointed to plan and determine specifications for the communications system. The plan became a reality when the system was installed in August, 1964. The association also acquired an FHA loan in 1977 to buy additional communications equipment for the local fire departments. The present County Communications Center is a result of Firemen's Association efforts beginning in 1964, and continuing over the years.

In July, 1964, an association committee chaired by Chief J. Reid Poovey, Jr., current president of the Catawba County Firemen's Association, was appointed to investigate the possibilities of establishing a fire training ground. From these early beginnings have grown a fire and rescue training ground located off Highway 16. The land, leased by the county, was then leased to the association.

During the first years of organization, the association voted to sponsor a Fire School in Newton. Since then, the October event has grown in attendance and importance. Courses are taught by instructors from the N.C. Department of Insurance. It is currently one of two major training schools held by the association in the County. In addition to the Fall Fire School, the association has sponsored a Spring Fire School held in conjunction with Catawba Valley Community College since 1977.

The association was instrumental in the hiring of a fire marshal and the adoption of a Fire Prevention Code. In 1965, they unanimously endorsed the efforts of the County Manager and County Commissioners to secure a fire marshal. Captain Harry Yount introduced the idea of a county wide Fire Prevention Code in January of 1966, and suggested the association appoint a Fire Prevention Code Committee to further develop the proposal. Members agreed that the code should be enforced by a fire marshal, building inspector, or licensed electrician appointed by the County. The committee submitted a report to the Catawba County Commissioners which recommended the adoption of a fire prevention code, and the employment of a qualified fire marshal to enforce the code.

A special meeting was called in April of 1967 to discuss the County's lack of action in pursuing the employment of a fire marshal. The delay was caused, in part, by the death of County Manager George Wilkinson. Chief Kenneth Kahill met with the new County Manager, Charles McGinnis, who stated that Commissioners would discuss the position at their meeting in late June. Association members presented a resolution to the County in August, 1967, and a part-time Fire Marshal, William "Bud" Richards, was appointed. The new employee was to help develop a County Fire Prevention Code and work with area fire departments.

Association members Floyd Frye and Captain Larson Moore, along with two persons designated by County Commissioners, were appointed to a committee to develop a budget and job description for a full-time fire marshal which would be hired in the following year. In May of 1968, the committee specified that the new fire marshal would coordinate all firefighting activities within the Commissioners' jurisdiction, act as a liaison between fire departments and the County Commissioners, aid in the development of new departments and advise them about

equipment problems, assist in fire prevention programs, and coordinate mutual aid programs in the county. The new fire marshal would be offered a salary of \$8500, with operating expenses of \$8000.

Fred D. Elkins, a retired Army Master/Sergeant from Fayetteville, N.C., with numerous qualifications and thirty-nine years of firefighting experience, was appointed to the post of fire marshal from a field of forty-seven applicants in January, 1969. Fire Marshal Elkins was given the key to the city in April of that year. He began compiling a specific set of rules and regulations concerning fire safety and fire prevention to relieve pressure on volunteers. But he did not see the completion of a Fire Prevention Code, because he resigned in December, 1969.

The Fire Prevention Code, first mentioned by Harry Yount in 1966 and modeled after the American Insurance Association Fire Prevention Code, was finally adopted by County Commissioners on April 6, 1970. Prior to this time, when unsafe conditions were found, remedies were only suggested. Now the County had fire laws which could be enforced by the Fire Marshal, as well as a fire prevention inspector.

David A. Yount from the Morganton Fire Department was appointed the new Fire Marshal in February, 1970. He immediately went to work and completed a Fire Prevention Code for the County. He noted the rapid growth in population and stated that many districts needed to find a way to share expenses for fire protection. Although his predecessor had advocated a county-wide fire tax, Yount eventually promoted individual fire tax districts. During his tenure, Fire Marshal Yount assisted with the formation of St. Timothy and Sherrills Ford-Terrell Volunteer Fire Departments, and the Maiden Rural Fire District and Board of Directors. He also urged all departments to participate in the educational activities of Fire Prevention Week each October. Under his leadership and in conjunction with the Catawba County Firemen's Association and Agricultural Extension Department, Fire Marshal Yount established a 4-H Fire Safety Program for 5th and 6th graders in local county schools. In addition, he prepared an up-dated mutual aid agreement which was signed by all area departments. The County agreed to pay each department \$200 per month for mutual aid service. The compensation replaced the older \$75 rural call payment.

The Firemen's Association adopted new committees in 1972 to handle their growing agenda. Added to the Constitution and Bylaws were the Legal, School, Program, Communications, and Membership Committees. During the same year, they supported the fire marshal's recommendation that a new employee be added to his office to assist with inspection and enforcement of the Fire Prevention Code. In July, 1973, the County approved the request and decided to employ a combination Fire and Building Inspector. In August, Rupert H. Little from the Claremont Fire Department was hired to fill the part-time post. Mr. Little became a full-time employee in July of 1974, and was given the title Assistant Fire Marshal.

Kent L. Brown, an inspector from Mecklenburg County, was appointed Fire Marshal in July, 1975. He replaced David Yount who was appointed Director of Emergency services upon the resignation of "Bud" Richards. Fire Marshal Brown assisted with the formation of the Startown Volunteer Fire Department, and conducted numerous fire prevention programs. The Fire Marshal worked with the

Catawba County Firemen's Association to purchase an air compressor system for use by all area fire departments. With a thorough knowledge of fire suppression training, Fire Marshal Brown taught and led county firefighters for six years. During his tenure, an additional employee was added to the Fire Marshal's staff. J. David Pruitt, a volunteer with the Mt. View Fire Department, was hired as a full-time inspector and fire educator.

Fire Marshal Charles R. Doty replaced Kent L. Brown in September, 1981. Formerly a Fire Marshal with the Shelby Fire Department, Doty has spent approximately twenty-five years in fire service. He has drastically increased the number of fire inspections, improved the quality of fire education, and strengthened public relations. During his tenure, Fire Marshal Doty has assisted in the establishment of a training ground for fire and rescue personnel, the lowering of fire insurance rates in fire districts, and the replacement of out-dated fire apparatus which existed in many of the departments.

Since his office is a division of Catawba County Protective Services, Fire Marshal Doty works closely with other agencies such as the Catawba County Health Department, Mental Health, Department of Social Services, Sheriff's Department, and Forest Ranger, as well as the SBI and FBI, when investigating arson or inspecting buildings and homes. Inspections are an integral part of the fire marshal's work. He, along with his employees, inspects businesses and industries with varying frequency. The level of hazard determines the number of inspections per year. Schools are inspected quarterly as mandated by North Carolina Law. Places of public assembly are also inspected, and capacity limits are set. All inspections are based on the Fire Prevention Code, and are performed to prevent fire and fire losses.

The Fire Marshal's office and individual fire departments also work closely with Catawba County Emergency Medical Services when fire related injuries occur. Many volunteer firefighters were instrumental in establishing rescue units in their own communities, and all have qualified as fire rescue personnel. Others qualified as Emergency Medical Technicians by attending various training classes offered throughout the County.

Over the last decade, the Catawba County Firemen's Association has held fund raisers to benefit the N.C. Burn Center and worked to establish a new training center. They have also purchased a new air trailer and continue to support the needs of firefighters.

COMMUNICATIONS

Fire communications among volunteers in Catawba County has advanced tremendously since the days of pan banging, bell ringing, and whistle tooting of the early 20th century. As technology progressed, the communications system, which is the lifeline of the fireman, progressed with it.

Thirty years ago, telephones were the only means of alerting volunteers when a fire occurred. Phones were installed at the fire station, and at several other strategic places in the fire district. One person, generally the wife of a fireman, assumed the responsibility of manning the home phone twenty-four hours a day. This person acted as a dispatcher, and was given the telephone numbers of others, usually firemen's wives, who acted as relays. These persons

notified a predetermined list of firemen at their homes or businesses.

As the need to shorten response time became apparent, Citizen Band radics were purchased by the firemen and placed in their homes and automobiles. Base stations were installed, usually at the chief's residence. The units were financed by the individual departments or firemen.

In 1964, the Catawba County Firemen's Association advocated the purchase of a county-wide communications system. A committee, headed by Tom DeRhodes, presented the plan along with bids to the county commissioners. Additional enticement for the purchase of the system was added when firemen explained to the County that insurance rates could be reduced if the new communications equipment met certain standards. In April, 1963, each department was asked to make a list of their communication needs. They were instructed to consider the county-furnished equipment as well as additional department-furnished equipment they would require.

A new communications system was obtained from Motorola at a cost of \$51,438. The price included a two-way radio system between fire central control station, located in Newton, NC, and each fire department. Mobile units for individual departments, linked directly to fire central, were also included in the purchase price. An automatic radio signaling system simultaneously activated the fire station siren and receiver monitors of the specified department and gave messages to volunteers in their homes. The County furnished ten monitors to the volunteers of each department. Firemen could also obtain equipment to supplement the County purchase. Western Electronics held the service contract, but individual departments were required to pay for the service of monitors at a cost of \$3 per call.

A more modern county-financed communications system was developed in 1969. It began as a single console operation with one dispatcher. The system was originally housed in the old Newton jailhouse on the third floor. Several Page months later it was moved to the basement of the same building. Windowless and isolated, former dispatchers recall no heat was required in the small room because communications equipment emitted adequate warmth. When a fire call was received by the dispatcher at the Communications Center, the operator determined which department should respond by referring to a map of fire districts located above the radio console. The dispatcher pushed a button which activated the department siren and radio monitors. An automatic device notified the dispatcher that the siren had sounded, and the dispatcher radioed the fire location to volunteers over the monitors. With a single phone call, volunteers were now alerted to fires in their district.

During this period, volunteers from each department took turns administering radio checks from the Communications Center to all departments on Tuesday nights. According to departmental minutes, volunteers were awed by the new console, and were, at first, hesitant to offer their services on Tuesday nights.

By 1971, the Communications Center had won national acclaim. It was selected by the National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington, D.C., for a County Achievement Award because of its progressive developments. By April of the same year, fire central was dispatching approximately 1500 emergency calls a month.

Several months later, a second console was purchased for the Communications Center, and a second operator was added to first and second shifts. One operator remained on the third shift. The center was receiving approximately 28,500 transmissions a month, and a SECODE system was installed for additional capability. Furthermore, all calls were recorded by tape.

The County agreed to cover insurance on county-owned radio equipment in 1973. Individual departments were expected to provide insurance coverage for mobile units.

In 1977, the Catawba County Firemen's Association was again involved in the purchase of new radio equipment for all local fire departments. They secured a loan from the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) and signed a contract with Motorola. The County reimbursed them for much of the cost.

The Communications Center moved to the new Justice Center in approximately 1980, and added an additional console to their unit. A basic 911 emergency call system, which saved residents precious time when reporting a fire, was installed in 1982. Three persons now dispatch calls on first and second shifts, while two operators work on third.

The communications equipment was again updated with the use of transistors. Firemen now carry Minitor pocket pagers at all times. The pagers can be activated even when turned off, and are technologically superior to anything firemen have possessed in the past. When the Communications Center receives a fire call, pagers immediately alert all volunteers, wherever they are, and allow a quickened response time. Ultimately, response time is one of the most important factors in effectively preserving life and property from fires. With the addition of the Enhanced 911 which became operational on November 1, 1987, response time is greatly reduced.

FIREFIGHTING TRENDS: TRADITION VERSUS CHANGE

Although some aspects of volunteer firefighting in Catawba County have not changed, many more have drastically altered over the last thirty years. Volunteers have met the challenges thrust upon them by change, and moved forward.

Since tremendous demands are made on volunteer firefighters, good people are becoming harder to find and keep. Most volunteers work regular jobs, lose money from paying jobs while firefighting, spend hours away from home training, and still pay fire taxes. Some departments say they do not have a problem with manpower, but most acknowledge it is a growing concern. Some rural departments would be unable to adequately respond to structural fire calls during regular working hours if not for the County-wide mutual aid agreement.

Yet in larger departments where annexation has occurred, mutual aid has become almost obsolete. Cities automatically respond with a truck to structural calls, negating the need for additional help. One local department has not called for mutual aid services in over five years.

Because of the tremendous increase in the cost of outfitting a new volunteer, departments are much more cautious when approving a new person for membership. New applicants must endure a three to six month probationary period, and in some cases a background check, before they are accepted as full-time firemen. One local firefighter states that if a volunteer remains with the department for two years, he will probably stay for twenty.

The state has mandated each department keep annual and monthly records since 1979. As regulations have grown, so have the headaches associated with them. Many departments have employed the use of computers to assist them with their growing obligations. Others wish aloud for an employee to handle the continuous backlog of paperwork.

The days of monthly meetings and occasional fire drills have been replaced by rigorous training requirements. In 1972, the State mandated thirty-six hours of training per year for fireman certification. Additional hours of training will soon be added. As a result, many of the firemen are looking forward to retirement. In the early years, one fire school was offered at Newton each year. Now, numerous training schools are held across the country and County.

Firefighting appears to be a family tradition in most of the fire departments in Catawba County. Three, sometimes four, generations of volunteers will join a department from a single family. In several instances, the son will follow in the father's footsteps as chief.

The cost of equipment has skyrocketed over the past thirty years. A new pumper could be obtained for approximately \$10,000 in 1958. Today, the average cost of a new pumper is \$125,000. Aside from inflation and cost of living increases, firemen attribute the phenomenal rise in prices to the necessity of the equipment. They state that manufacturers know communities require the equipment, and therefore the price is inflated.

Even though the price of equipment is increasing, firemen no longer accept the lowest bid. The firemen's first priority is that equipment meet specifications. Superior quality and adequate maintenance service have become major concerns as well, since firefighters no longer have to scramble for funding. Purchasing decisions are generally made by the chief, board of directors or city council. In the past, some firemen questioned the board's or council's lack of knowledge about equipment, but the problem was alleviated. Most Catawba County firemen and chiefs say that all equipment asked for is granted.

Recently mandated standards for protective clothing and equipment have resulted in greater safety for firefighters. But the standards have also placed a strain on the budgets of some smaller rural departments unwilling to drastically raise the fire taxes of residents in their community. One local chief explained that as soon as new protective clothing was purchased to meet standards, a new and better type of clothing was developed before the previous purchase was paid in full.

The present cost of outfitting a new volunteer is approximately \$500 - a far cry from the expense of a plastic raincoat used to outfit firefighters in the early 1960s. One veteran county firefighter commented that the temperature in the plastic raincoats was "hotter than the fire itself." Prior to the use of

raincoats, volunteers fought fires in whatever they happened to be wearing or could "throw on" when the alarm sounded - and the alarm usually sounded at very inconvenient times.

Relations with public officials have drastically improved with the development of the Fire Marshal's office and fire tax districts. Before this time, firefighters felt neglected and taken for granted. They had to raise the funds necessary for the majority of their operational expenses. Although the county had tried for a number of years to work out a form of compensation for departments, prior to the establishment of fire tax districts departments were paid a mere \$75 for responding to rural calls. In the early 1970s, the County began supporting firefighters by hiring a Fire Marshal and advocating a district fire tax. Relations between the county and firemen have steadily improved since then.

Most firemen say they make a concerted effort not to become involved in politics. Yet some admit that the notoriety of being a fireman helps their individual businesses.

The relationship between citizens and fire departments maybe on the wane. Citizens took the responsibility for forming volunteer departments, long before government agencies stepped in. Citizens provided, through solicitations and donations, the funds necessary to establish and operate departments. But with the levying of fire taxes and the steady income it provides, citizens no longer see the need to remain active supporters of their fire departments. One local fire chief believes it is up to the individual departments to involve the community in fire department activities. Several departments have successfully drawn the community back to them by sponsoring barbecues, haunted houses, and fish fries.

More often, firemen involve the community in educational fire prevention activities. Since the county has adopted a Fire Prevention Code and hired a fire marshal, volunteers have taught fire prevention to children in local schools. Community support for the activities held by each fire department during Fire Prevention Week is tremendous.

The amount of lives and property lost from fires has declined over the last five years. In the 1930s and 1940s, fire departments responded to only three or four fires per month. After World War II, population, industrialization, and commercialization grew by leaps and bounds. Before additional fire departments were established, the loss of property and lives, as well as the incidence of fires, increased sharply. As more departments were formed and fire taxes levied, volunteers taught fire prevention, up-dated equipment, and fought fires more efficiently. Since that time, the loss of property and lives, as well as the incidence of fires in proportion to population, has declined sharply. This record, alone, is reason enough to pay tribute to the volunteer firefighters of Catawba County who risk their lives daily for the public good, asking nothing in return.

Several traditions remain constant with most fire departments in the county - the use of red fire engines and placement of sirens atop firehouses. Studies show that red is not the most easily identifiable color, and modern communications make sirens obsolete. Yet the firemen and citizens are reluctant to change these traditions because they are reminders of the historically rich past of their departments.

HISTORY OF BANDYS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Prior to 1963, fire coverage for the Bandys community was provided by the distant Newton, Catawba, and Maiden Volunteer Fire Departments. Current Chief Dewey Little commented on the method of firefighting during those days. "All they did was come with one truck. You never saved a house back then. The first thing you did was start carrying things out because you knew the house would burn and be a total loss." Tired of inadequate fire protection, the citizens of the area took action. On February 8, 1962, plans were made to organize a rural fire department. At this meeting, the citizens discovered the Catawba County Commissioners and community endorsed their plan for organization.

Immediate progress was made. Carolina Glove, represented by Mayor Abernathy of Newton, donated a parcel of property on which to erect the new fire station. The group appointed a steering committee to plan the development of the department. On March 1, 1962, the members voted to name the new organization Bandys Crossroads Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. A unanimous vote to organize occurred on March 23, 1962. At the same meeting, a board of directors was elected.

An outpouring of community support for a fundraising drive provided the necessary income to proceed with the building. Construction on the new station began in May, 1963, and was completed before the end of the year.

The department acquired its first two pieces of equipment in early 1963. A 1963 International pumper was purchased for \$3,302, and related equipment was installed at a cost of \$3,059. A 1955 Chevrolet gas truck was converted into a 1,000 gallon tanker. The department's first chief, G. C. Lee, was elected, and the thirty-five volunteers began to service the community in January of 1964.

Several years later, more equipment was acquired. An American LaFrance pumper was purchased in 1966, and a brush truck was created from a civil defense 3/4 ton weapon carrier. In 1969, the old 1955 water wagon was replaced by a new Chevrolet truck with a 1,200 gallon tank. The old tanker was donated to, and graciously accepted by, the Sherrills Ford community which had recently organized their own department. Bandys Volunteer Fire Department had previously provided coverage for the lower end of the new Sherrills Ford district.

Community service was extended as the firemen hosted a 4-H Fire Safety Program for fourth graders of the area. The firemen have continued this service through the present.

In April, 1970, a new well was dug at the station. The department planned to erect a storage tank for their own water supply.

A 24' x 56' addition was added to the station in 1971. Door-to-door solicitations were held in May, 1970, to raise funds for construction. The addition provided much needed space for equipment, meetings, and training. The firemen, themselves, donated the labor needed to complete the addition.

Residents supported a March 31, 1973, election held for the purpose of levying a fire tax. The first check from the tax arrived several months later. With

History of Bandys Volunteer Fire Department

their new source of funding, firemen purchased another new pumper in 1974. The 1963 pumper was sold.

Approximately 80 residents of the Oliver Crossroads area met on March 8, 1977, to engage in a heated debate concerning the formation of a new or satellite fire department which would lower insurance rates and more adequately protect the community. The majority of the Bandys firemen thought it best to leave the present fire district as it was. However, Maiden had no qualms about losing a bit of its tax base to the new satellite department. Chief Drum conveyed the board's support, provided the Oliver Crossroads residents agreed to furnish the land, building, and volunteers. After a lengthy discussion, the group decided to form a satellite station. When the meeting adjourned, a large number of men registered to become volunteers for the new station which was called Bandys Fire Department No. 2.

The satellite station quickly took shape. Howard Burris donated a thickly wooded lot, and ground was broken in August, 1977. The community donated material. Firemen donated their skills and labor. A 1966 American LaFrance pumper was transferred from the older station, and the remaining two pieces of equipment were assembled by the firemen, themselves. In his spare time, Chief Drum converted a 1973 International drink carrier into a tanker by sawing the chassis apart, cutting a section out, welding the chassis together, and shortening the wheel base. The result was a 1,200 gallon "quick dump" tanker which pumped 350 gpm. A weapons carrier was also converted by the firemen into a 4-wheel drive brush truck for \$2,500. Finally, an additional fire tax district called Bandys No. 2 was established by the General Assembly in 1978. Built and completely equipped for approximately \$50,000, the new department began servicing one of the few remaining inadequately protected areas of Catawba County on March 24, 1979.

In the early 1980s, the firemen worked diligently to obtain a lower insurance rating for the district. A new 1980 Ford F-800 pumper-tanker, which carried 1,500 gallons of water and had a 350 gpm pump capacity, was purchased from Howe Equipment Company and placed at the older station. Pre-fire plans of all major structural buildings within the Bandys operating district were drawn, and massive amounts of paperwork were completed in 1981. During the next several years, all weather water points were established within two miles of each residence. In the winter of 1983, the brush truck at Station 1 was rebuilt. This year also marked the retirement of the first twenty year veteran of the department, Paul Everette Setzer. By 1984, the class 9 insurance rate was lowered to a class 8, and significantly reduced the insurance premiums for residents of the area.

As the district grew, the need for more modern equipment became essential. The tanker, built by Chief Drum in 1979, was sold in 1984 and replaced by a new 1985 GMC truck from Slagle Equipment with a 1,250 gallon tank capacity.

During the operational years of the department, six men served as chief. They include: G. C. Lee, Roy Story, Jack Wilson, Ray Drum, Ken Drum, and current Chief Dewey Little. Originally 35 strong, the membership roster has grown to

History of Bandys Volunteer Fire Department

51 - 25 at one station and 26 at the other. "Manpower," stated Chief Little, "is our greatest strength." The protected area is double the size of other districts because of the satellite department. And because of this sister station, the department can usually muster a 20 man response to daytime fires when other departments are lucky to have a turnout of 7. The turnout is even more impressive when considering the 89 blazes fought last year alone.

The residents of the Bandys community still support the fundraising activities of the department. But Chief Little does not care for the term "fundraiser." Instead, he refers to the fundraisers as "public relations." The community looks forward to these events which include fish and chicken suppers, as well as barbecues. The Ladies Auxiliary helps with suppers and holds raffles approximately once a year. Chief Little reported that in earlier years, when "public relations" were the only means of income for the department, the ladies were much more active.

Fire tax in the area has steadily decreased to the present rate, \$.029 per \$100 valuation. The chief attributes the decrease to budgeting and planning. The department planned to buy a truck for three years. Thirty thousand dollars of fire tax money was set aside for several years. The 1963 International truck was sold for \$4,000 more than was paid for it, and gave the department an additional \$18,000. The remainder of the funds for the new truck came from the County emergency contingency fund. Chief Little states, "We about cleaned it (the contingency fund) out. But that's what its there for. Why not use it instead of raising taxes?" Today the firemen owe nothing on the pumper which arrived in September, 1987.

The new pumper, built by Wolverine Fire Apparatus of Michigan, was the first of its type in North Carolina. The department chose this truck over others because the dealer "would build what we wanted, as we wanted it, without cutting corners or doing things their way." Futhermore, Chief Little states that the truck is serviced locally. The new pumper will be displayed at the firehouse expo in Charlotte during the coming month. Since the truck was purchased, two other volunteer departments in the County have obtained equipment from Wolverine Fire Apparatus. Maiden has purchased a tanker, and Mt. View has acquired a pumper.

Chief Little explains, "We like to think we're a leader. If Maiden and Mt. View are happy, then we set a milestone." The department was also the first in the County to have drop tank which filled in 30 seconds, according to Chief Little. A Bandys' fireman who worked as an engineer designed the tank for the department. If these accomplishments are an indicator, Bandys Volunteer Fire Department is indeed an innovative force in the County.

HISTORY OF THE CATAWBA VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The thoughts and actions of the Catawba Volunteer Fire Department have been well documented through a continuous set of minutes dating back to the first departmental meeting on September 15, 1937. At this time, Chief Neill Sherrill, newly appointed by the Catawba Town Board, called a meeting to organize the volunteer fire fighters. The Constitution and Bylaws of the Hickory Fire Department were read and amended for departmental use. At their second meeting, members appointed a Complaint and Grievance Committee chaired by W. H. Wilkinson, and elected W. M. Ruffy as Property Man.

The organization's first year of existence was a precarious one. During the third meeting, E. L. Huffman offered his barber shop as a heated meeting place for the winter. Firemen also decided to wash streets as a means of acquiring additional funds for the department, but this venture was given up after only a short period of time because of criticism within the department. In May, the regular meeting night was changed from the first Monday night to the first Tuesday night so it would not conflict with the meeting of the Town Board. At the May session, the department also held its first discussion of fire hydrant maintenance. The members met in special session during June to elect a new chief, E. L. Huffman, due to the resignation of Neill Sherrill. Huffman, too resigned in May, 1939, and his unexpired term was filled by R. Malone Brown who served until he left for Army service in November, 1943.

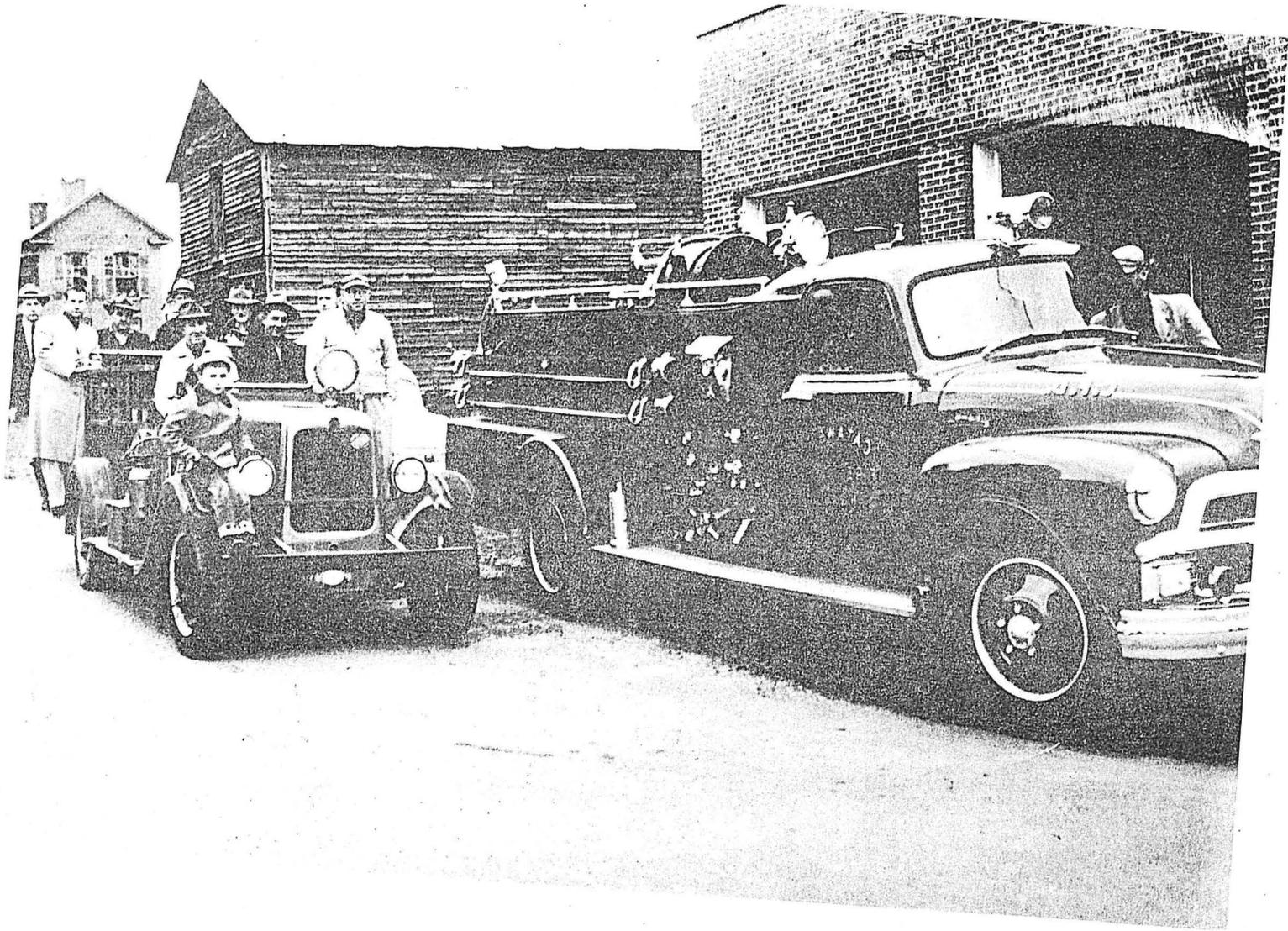
Fringe benefits and social gatherings offered enticement to those who aspired to fire fighting in the town. Members were relieved of their Town and County Poll Tax in April, 1938. Fish fries, a tradition begun in January of 1938, were held in the Masonic dining room. Oyster and ice creams suppers were also held on a regular basis.

The Department's first major purchase was an electric lantern. This was acquired with department funds raised through free will offerings taken at each meeting, street washing funds, and a \$.10 monthly membership fee.

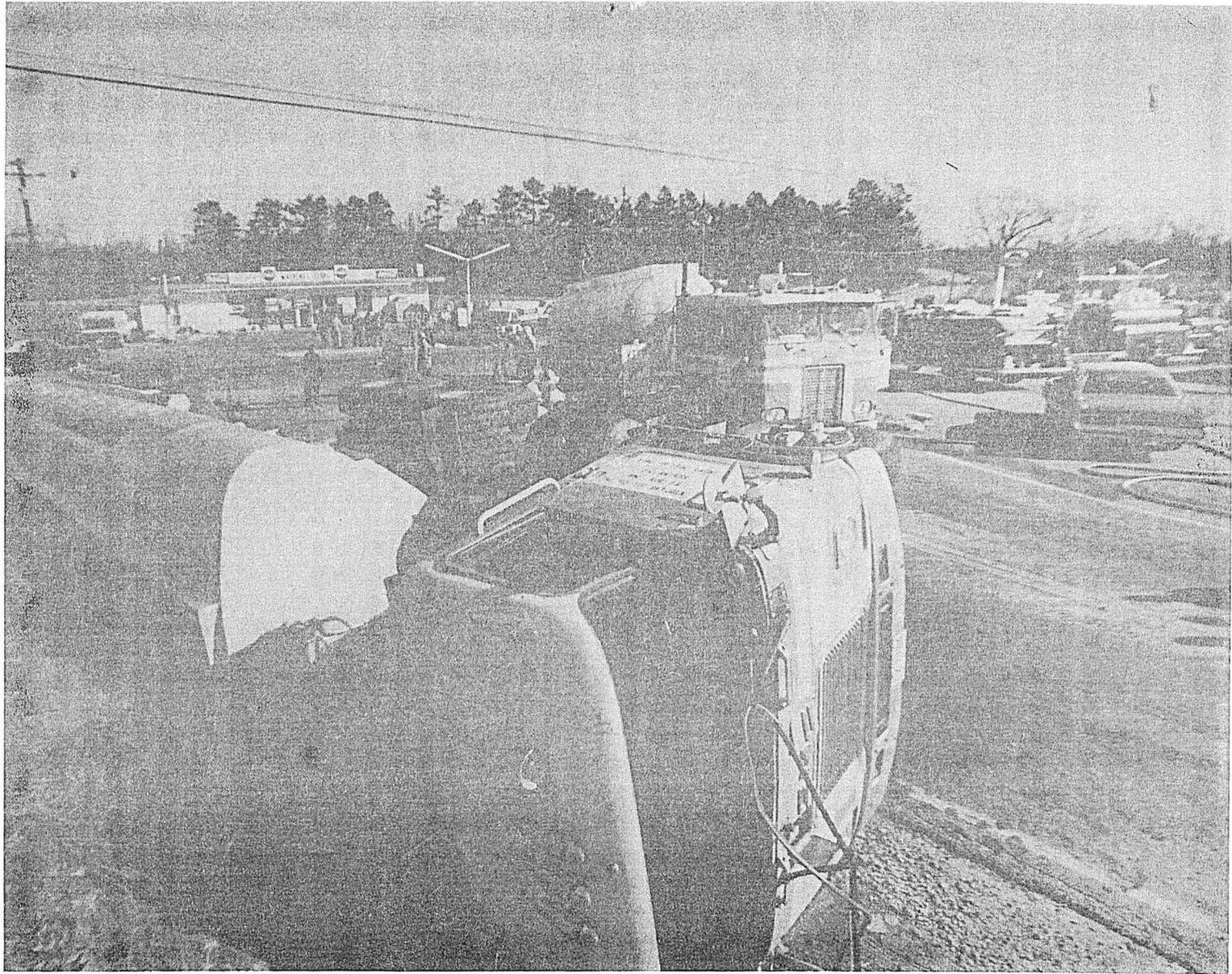
Meetings during the early years were somewhat haphazard in content. In January, 1940, the secretary of the department was fined \$.01 for forgetting the minutes of the prior meeting. The Chief was designated as peacekeeper among two of the firemen, yet he, along with others, was charged \$.10 for disorderly conduct at meetings. Formal initiation of firemen included taking the new member to a drill and stationing him at the nozzle - alone.

An average of three calls per year were answered during the early days. The Town Board paid each fireman \$1.00 for responding to a fire alarm.

During World War II, the fire department lost many men to the U.S. Army. These included Chief R. M. Brown, Treasurer W. M. Ruffy, G. Y. Allen, Reggie Nichols, Howard Wilkinson, J. S. Danner and Floyd Edwards. Each Christmas during the war, the department sent Christmas greetings to each of the men, evidence of the close comraderie among them. The Department unanimously decided to cut the membership roster from twenty-one to nineteen, since there were no other available men in the area to join the department. During this time, meetings consisted of discussions about fires resulting from air raids. Firemen participated in several blackouts held in the County, and decided to work out signals to distinguish blackout warnings from fires.



Catawba is one of the oldest fire departments



Bandys responds to a highway emergency

History of Catawba Volunteer Fire Department

After his departure for the Army, Chief Brown was replaced by Assistant Chief Challie Jones. In September, 1944, E. L. Huffman was elected Chief and served until he entered a change of profession. At this time R. M. Brown returned from the war and was hired by the Town Board to maintain the fire truck, attend the signal light, and act as Fire Chief for a fee of \$5.00 per month.

The first description of a major fire is made in the January, 1943, minutes. The department lost three joints of hose during this apartment fire. However, the delay was not serious due to the forethought of Chief Brown who was already in the act of laying another line in case fire got out of control and spread to the house nearby. Fifteen firemen answered this call - a record attendance. The worst fire to date is mentioned in the January, 1945, minutes, when a form of mutual aid is given by the Newton Department which offered its manpower and pump truck. Nevertheless, the house was completely destroyed.

Irritating obstacles such as a leaky roof, and an overly excited citizenry caused problems for the fire fighters. Hose was run over by cars during fires. The town decided to fine these offenders. Eventually red flags and flagmen were placed at necessary places to stop all traffic and to keep cars from following the fire truck and blocking it. A weak fire truck battery caused countless headaches until a battery charger was procured.

In September, 1946, a new slate of officers was elected to serve the department, but because of a great lack of interest which plagued the department for many years, these officers refused to serve. The old officers were reinstated. A bond referendum which carried in March, 1947, enabled the building of a new town hall and fire department. The first meeting held in the new quarters occurred in June, 1948; however, the new residence did little to spark interest among department members. For a short time in 1951, members were fined \$.10 for each meeting missed.

The early 1950s brought many changes, and hopes that the Town of Catawba would, at least, derive some direct benefit from a new county fire truck. Residents of Catawba were angry because the county-owned truck was placed in Hickory to cover rural fire calls. They demanded the same fire protection. Several months later, the County agreed to pay all municipalities \$75 per rural call. The Town Board gave in and purchased a new truck for city use which was delivered in October, 1954.

During the mid 1950s, the department decided to have regular drills and gain a greater knowledge of their equipment in order to better serve their community. Yet Town fire coverage was still much better than county coverage. Discussions of county zoning for fire protection took precedence at meetings because firemen were answering calls from Claremont to Statesville. The department agreed to take trucks to fires as far as twelve miles away. But only in the Town would both trucks be taken to fires. At last, another truck was added, and the old truck was traded. It was hoped that this truck would be paid for by the County, and it eventually was. Firemen was decided that the siren would blow two short blasts to distinguish a rural from a Town fire.

With the early 1960s came advances in technology. The department purchased two oxygen tanks and masks and one air purifier for use in dense smoke. The Town

History of Catawba Volunteer Fire Department

Board approved a siren button for the Chief's home, along with three automatic switches which were installed on the water pump. The members joined the Catawba County Firemen's Association in June, 1962, and began sending members to fire schools and conventions at departmental expense. One thousand fire phone numbers were distributed to citizens to place on their phones. Regular radio checks occurred the first Tuesday of each month beginning in January, 1965. But for several years, Chief Ray Robinson (served 1965 - 1972) had problems with Tuesday night attendance. He urged more members to become familiar with radio equipment. In 1966, the Town ordered a panel truck for the department.

Chief R. M. Brown retired on his 58th birthday in 1967 after 30 years of service. Others retiring the same year included E. W. Martin and Clyde Simon whose first retirement check was voted to be used as a supper for all.

Fireman Jerry Miller was elected Chief in 1972. During his tenure, the issue of a countywide fire tax surfaced. Several firemen attended a meeting in Newton in December, 1972, to discuss the possibility of a countywide fire tax. They reported that the meeting "didn't go over well," and discussed alternative forms of fire taxation. In May, 1974, the Fire Marshal had a sufficient of names from the Catawba district to justify an election for a fire tax. The vote was held on January 18, 1975, and the citizens approved a fire tax showing their support of the volunteer department. The first rural fire tax rate was \$.068 per \$100 valuation. A budget of \$10,400 was requested and received during this year.

The department resolved to better serve the county fire district and to update their equipment. The County Pumper needed extensive repairs. The Chief directed the men to make necessary adjustments to the old town truck so it could be used as a water wagon, and fittings were installed on the water wagon so that it could be used a pumper. Still the County pumper was in critical condition. The Department decided to buy a 1969 Ford 3/4 ton four-wheel drive truck with money from their special fund. Several raffles were held to raise money to equip this truck as a brush buggy. In January, 1974, the Chief went before the Town Board to discuss the purchase and specifications for a new pumper which would be needed in approximately three years. During May, 1975, the Town decided to pay for repairs to the county truck. A new tanker was acquired in October, 1976, and discussions of selling or loaning the old pumper to a newly established department in the County never materialized. The Ladies Auxiliary was very active during this time. The contributed a substantial amount of money to the department on several occasions for the purchase of new equipment. Presently the ladies sell pecans and cookbooks to raise funds for the department.

During February, 1974, the department became more involved with community activities including a 4-H Fire Prevention and Safety Program offered to 5th and 6th graders. The firemen have continued this service for many years.

New bylaws were accepted and became effective on November 1, 1977. Several months later, amendments to these bylaws were made. Shortly thereafter, an effort was made to secure a 9AA Insurance rating in the rural district of Catawba. Boundary discrepancies with Bandys Volunteer Fire Department had to

History of Catawba Volunteer Fire Department

be resolved, and membership increased, before this rating was obtained. During February, 1978, Chief Miller entertained the notion of naming the rural fire district. The name created by the firemen and approved for the Catawba area was the Riverside Fire District. In the same year, a portable generator was donated to the department, and the necessary accessories were purchased to make it operable.

Chief Miller served until 1980, when Joe Sigmon was elected to replace him. Chief Sigmon served until 1983, and was replaced by Carroll Yount whose term lasted until 1985. Following in the tradition of father Ray Robinson, Donald Robinson was elected Chief in 1985, and currently holds the position. He recalls nights when his father would answer a fire call. Young Don would ask permission to tag along with his father, but his father always refused. Don would then hide in the back of this truck, and make his presence known as his father approached the fire scene. Chief Robinson joined the department in 1979, at the age of eighteen. When elected Chief, Robinson was thought to be the youngest Chief in North Carolina.

Construction of a new fire station began in August, 1985, and was made possible by a bond issue overwhelmingly approved by the people of Catawba. The new station is probably the largest in the County, and will house seven vehicles. This \$200,000 building is six times the size of the old quarters. It was constructed because of cramped conditions in the old station in the town's municipal building. The cost of the building did not include the land which was already held by the Town of Catawba. A dedication ceremony was held on May 14, 1986, and a special award was given to John Ruffy, Jr., whose father, now deceased Town Commissioner, John Ruffy, Sr., was instrumental in building the new station.

The Catawba Fire Department added as new truck in 1985 which serves the area outside of the town limits. The truck is a GMC 1000 gpm pumper with a 1000 gallon tank. It finally replaced the old 1954 Chevrolet 500 gpm pumper with a 500 gallon tank.

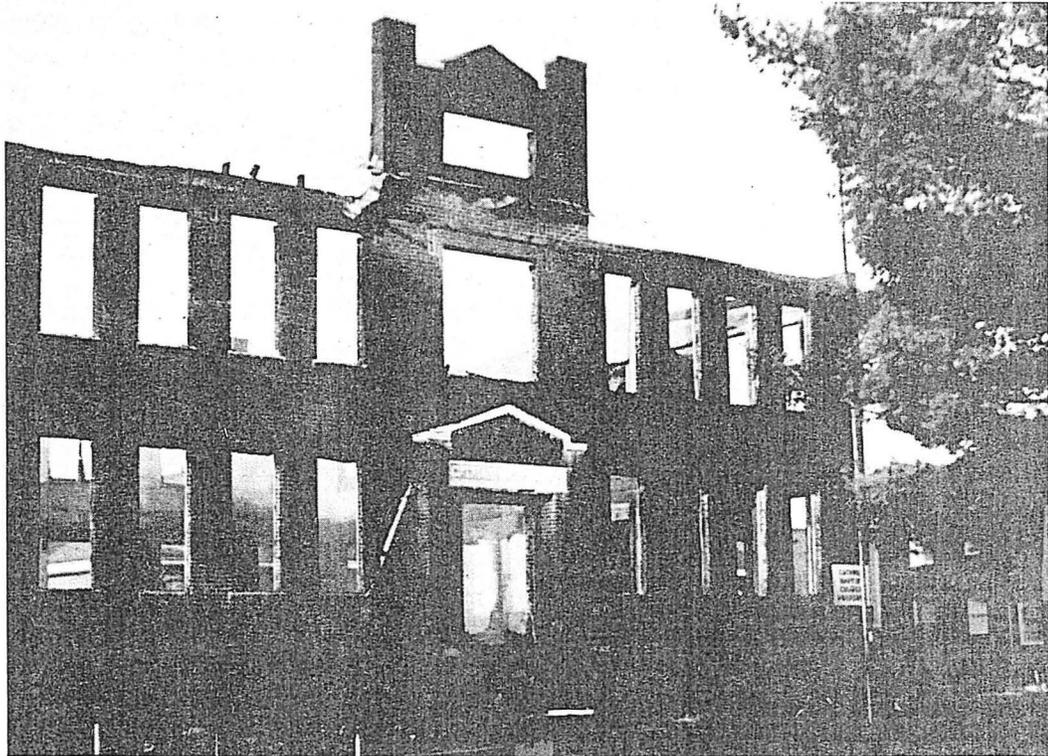
Robinson said the tax rate is now \$.05 per \$100 valuation. The Department raised taxes because little industry is located within the area. The legislators "did away with personal property tax last year. When they did our budget dropped and you have to make up for it somewhere," said the Chief. Because the town is paying for the new fire station, contributions from the town and fire tax district are approximately equal. The County determines the tax rate for the rural service district. But Robinson points to the many departmental expenses of which the public is unaware. Insurance, utilities and turnout gear cost the department thousands of dollars per year. Air packs and pagers comprise other major but necessary expenses.

The enterprising department holds annual fish fries as a means of paying for incidental expenses. The recent ill-fated midget basketball game, which was to pit the firemen against midgets, turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the midgets did not show up until too late. The Department offered the citizens their money back, but many donated the money to the department. As a result, the Department made more money since the midgets were not given a portion of the proceeds.

History of the Catawba Volunteer Fire Department

The Catawba Volunteer Fire Department celebrated its 50th anniversary in September, 1987. Since that time, the Department has been most remembered for the 1988 practice burning of the 65 year old Catawba High School. Fire fighters from five counties gathered for this event, and fought eight separate blazes using 170,000 gallons of water from twelve tankers. This building was burned without damaging a thing but the feelings of historians who fought for the preservation of the old school which firemen considered a fire hazard.

Presently, the Department boasts of 38 volunteers and a new 1987 1000 gpm top mounted pumper which carries 1000 gallons of water. The volunteers fight approximately seventy fires per year.



HISTORY OF THE CLAREMONT VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The City fathers of Claremont realized the need for fire protection when the City was chartered in 1893. Accordingly, the Claremont Bucket Brigade was begun with volunteers Knox Huffman, Jim Yount, and Jake Isenhour. Past Chief Charles Baker recalled the early days of fire fighting. When a blaze occurred, someone banged on a pan to alert the public. Citizens formed a line and passed water buckets to the fire's edge. The end man threw water directly on the fire. Larger blazes were rarely contained.

The City water works, completed in 1939, ended the necessity of the Bucket Brigade. The City purchased a hand pulled two-wheel cart with reel. Attached to the reel was 500 feet of two and a half inch hose. Former Chief Baker explained that after the volunteers pulled the cart to the fire, they were too tired to fight the blaze.

Later in the same year, Mayor Moser and Claremont Aldermen traveled to Gastonia to purchase a fire engine. The American LaFrance truck was chain driven and contained a hose bed. When inverted, its 100 gallon soda and acid tank would become pressurized. Current Chief Pope, a lifelong resident of Claremont, remembers seeing the truck as a young boy. "It was one of the old timsy trucks with the hand cranked siren," he said.

The first fire station was originally housed in a one-bay station at the old City Hall on 106 Main Street. As the department's needs and equipment grew in number, the building was no longer adequate. A new City Hall was constructed several hundred yards away from the older structure in 1960. The fire station was relocated to this new municipal building and remained there for 28 years. The firemen, City board, and rescue squad donated their manpower to construction of the new City Hall. Since then, the fire station has been completely renovated. New bays, offices, bathrooms, kitchen, and a meeting room were built by the firemen, themselves. Neither fire tax money nor City funds were needed.

The firemen voted to adopt a constitution and bylaws in 1961. At the same time, the department decided to keep an extensive record on all firemen, not allowing the membership roster to exceed 30 fire fighters unless the additional men were placed on auxiliary service.

Fire chiefs of the Claremont department acted as a liaison to their governing body, the City council. Hugh Hoke, appointed the first fire chief in 1939, was followed by Walter Little. Conley Sigmon obtained the position in 1956, and was succeeded by W. F. Linsberger. In the early 1960s, Jack Little held the post. Charles Baker, who joined the department in 1939, acquired the title of chief in 1962, and served the community in this position for 16 years. Chief Baker was forced to vacate the post in 1976 when he lost his right leg in a traffic injury. Yet he remained active in the department serving as fire department advisor for seven years until his death. He was replaced by Rupert H. Little, current Assistant Fire Marshal, who served until 1977. Chief Little was succeeded by Charles E. Pope who held the post of Chief until replaced by Michael Baker, son of Charles Baker, in 1981. At present, Charles Pope once again holds the title of chief. He has served as a fireman since 1970.

History of Claremont Volunteer Fire Department

Claremont fire fighting equipment changed dramatically over the years. After the use of bucket brigades, hand-pulled carts and chain-driven water wagons, the department purchased its first new pumper, a 1956 Ford, for a cost of \$10,977. The debt was retired in several years with donated funds. During the late 1950s, the department's only other piece of fire fighting equipment was a Ford pickup. In 1962, the firemen converted a truck into a water wagon at no charge. The City paid only for the tires. An old army weapons carrier was also modified by the department for use in brush fires. A radio and pump costing \$1500 were installed on the brush truck. The City covered the expense. Fish fries, donations, and solicitations provided the necessary funds to pay other debts accrued from the purchase of the water wagon and brush truck. In 1971, a new pumper was purchased at a cost of \$34,000. The department financed only \$7000. The debt was retired in only four years. Another new 1000 gpm C-900 Ford pumper was acquired in 1977. In 1978, a Chevrolet four-wheel drive vehicle replaced the old army jeep. A new Ford F-700 pumper-tanker arrived in 1979.

Today the department stores 385,000 gallons of water in their two water storage tanks. Numerous hydrants with National Standard Threads, and miles of water lines, produce an easily accessible source of water for the fire trucks.

When county commissioners considered the purchase of fire trucks for rural protection in the early 1950s, Claremont residents living in outlying areas demanded equal benefits from the proposal. The Claremont Board of Aldermen expressed their interest in the rural fire protection program to commissioners in 1953. By 1955, the Claremont Fire District had been outlined by County Planning Engineer, Charles Davis, Jr., and the City was under contract with the County for rural fire service. The County paid the municipality \$75 for each rural call. The City voted to place all money received from county fire calls into a Fire Truck Fund in 1964. Firemen fought blazes both inside and outside city limits for no charge.

Claremont citizens petitioned for a fire tax in early 1973. An election was held on March 31 of the same year. A favorable vote on the issue spoke for the citizens's high regard of the volunteer department. Today, Claremont's fire tax is \$.045 per \$100 valuation. Slightly more than one half of the organization's operating costs come from the county. The rest of the funding is appropriated by the City.

The early 1970s brought some relief to fire fighters. With the establishment of the Oxford and Bandys Fire Departments, the firemen were responsible for the coverage of less territory.

Fund raising is less important to the department now than in years past. Chief Pope relates that annual fish fries brought in quite a bit of money in the earlier days of the department. Today, fund raisers, such as hamburger and ice cream sales, are held jointly with the Ladies Auxiliary. The proceeds from these events are sometimes used to buy additional equipment, but more often are expended on "morale boosters" for the firemen. The Chief speculates that the popularity of fund raising projects has declined because of the tremendous amount of work they require. With increased training demands on firemen, the firemen simply do not have the time.

History of Claremont Volunteer Fire Department

Claremont is one of the few departments in the county with a Junior Firemen Program for aspiring fire fighters, aged 16 to 18. The youngsters are allowed to observe, train, and work with equipment. After reaching the age of 18, they can immediately begin fire fighting. But Chief Pope stresses to the youngsters that school comes before the fire department. If the students do not maintain a C average in their studies, they cannot remain in the program.

Chief Pope has seen many changes in the department during his lifetime. When he first joined, the organization had only two trucks. Now the department houses a fleet of modern equipment. He remembers when the public helped firemen fight grass and wood fires with little or no protective clothing. Now turnout gear must meet stringent specifications. Presently, the area enjoys a Class 6 insurance rating with every industry covered by a pre-fire plan - a feat unheard of in earlier days. Yet the chief believes the greatest change in fire fighting equipment has occurred in fire trucks. Pumpers with hydraulic air operated valves have replaced manually operated ones.

Forty Claremont volunteer firemen fight approximately seventy-five blazes per year with less property loss per fire than in years past. Like the legendary Chief Charles Baker, current Chief Pope agrees that the dedication and hard work of the volunteers is the greatest strength of the department.



HISTORY OF THE CONOVER VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Information concerning the early years of fire fighting in the Town of Conover is sparse at best. Incomplete town records and Town Board minutes indicate unorganized volunteers fought fires using hand operated wheelers with hose reels in the 1920s. For a small fee, the Newton Fire Department apparently assisted the Conover volunteers during this time. In the early 1930s, a hose was presumably fastened to a town-owned garbage truck. In the same period, the Hickory Fire Department was reimbursed for fire fighting assistance when aid was requested.

The Conover Fire Department was officially organized in 1942 under the leadership of their first volunteer Fire Chief, W. W. Saunders. Two designated drivers were assisted by a force of 15 volunteers. Yet the original organizational structure is much like today's. In 1979, J. Reid Poovey, Jr., was appointed the department's first paid full-time Chief - a position he holds at present. Two paid engineer drivers and a force of 58 volunteers are divided equally among the department's two stations which are led by District Chiefs Larry Setzer and Paul Yount.

During the interim between Chiefs Saunders and Poovey, a multitude of men held the unpaid volunteer position of Chief. These included F. M. Moehlman, Hugh Liem, and John Dellinger, John Alvin Bolick, appointed Chief in 1950, held that position until 1973. Since that time, Calvin Pitman, William Larry Setzer, Ronald Kaylor and J. Reid Poovey, Jr., have held the unpaid post. Chief Poovey explains the positions he held with the Conover Department throughout his thirty years of service:

"I've been up and down the ladder, I started out a regular fireman and, due to training, was promoted to training officer. I was Assistant Chief for years. I served under three Chiefs. I was elected Chief several times. In 1979, the paperwork and duties were so heavy - I was a volunteer Chief at that time - that I was having guilty feelings about the time I was spending away from work . . . sometimes twenty, even thirty hours per week."

Luckily, Poovey had an understanding supervisor. Shortly thereafter, Poovey spoke with the City Manager about the problem, and was hired as the Town's first paid full-time Chief.

The department along with other municipal offices was originally housed in the old Reformed Church. The church was demolished in 1967, and a new municipal building, completed in 1968, stands in its place. The Conover fire station is located in this building.

Fire fighting equipment has advanced both in cost and technology since the 1942 purchase of the department's first new Ford pumper. The original 500 gpm fire engine was equipped by American LaFrance. In 1957, another new 500 gpm Ford pumper equipped by Howe Fire Apparatus was acquired. Since then, the pumper has been sold. The late 1960s saw the conversion of a weapons carrier into a brush truck, and the adaptation of a military surplus jeep into an emergency equipment transporter. A 1968 Chevrolet van and 1978 Chevrolet four wheel drive mini-pumper have since replaced these two vehicles. The department

History of Conover Volunteer Fire Department

purchased a new 1000 gpm Ford pumper with Howe equipment for approximately \$38,000 in 1966. Five years later, they acquired a new 1500 gallon Ford tanker truck equipped with "quick dump" valve. After the organization annexed the St. Timothy area and the two stations merged in 1982, the tanker and outdated 1942 fire engine were declared surplus and sold in 1983.

The City assumed St. Timothy's outstanding debts in exchange for most of the department's assets which included: a 1971 Ward LaFrance 1000 gpm diesel pumper, a 1974 Dodge brush buggy, a 1976 Kenworth 2000 gpm pumper-tanker, a 1979 Kenworth 2000 gpm pumper-tanker with remote controlled 1000 gpm turret nozzle, and a 1983 GMC 1250 gallon tanker. All of this equipment remained at the newly renamed Station No. 2. A 1971 1250 gallon capacity International Tanker was transferred from Station No. 2 to Station No. 1 to replace the 1971 Ford tanker sold as surplus. Rather than purchase a new \$260,000 vehicle, the Conover department opted in 1986 to modify and recondition the 1976 Kenworth pumper at a cost of \$76,000. The specifications for the revamped retro-fit pumper with 50-foot telescopic water tower and aerial ladder were developed by Sherman Pickard, Fire Consultant for the N.C. League of Municipalities. Modification of this pumper completed Conover's service plan for the western area including the Conover Rural Fire District (formerly St. Timothy's).

In 1976, a new 1250 gpm Mack pumper was purchased and placed at Station No. 1. The department later acquired a 1982 Chief's car and a new 1985 personnel van.

Charles Davis, County Engineer and Planner, established the district boundaries for the Conover Department in September, 1955. A contract with the County paid the municipality \$75 for each rural call answered, however the Chief had the right to refuse to answer calls in rural areas if, in his opinion, services would be useless because of distance.

Conover differed from other volunteer departments during the 1960s. The City owned most of their equipment, but all of the fire fighting was done by volunteers. In approximately 1969, newspapers reported the County Commissioners received an ultimatum from the City of Conover. The City stated money was lost on calls in rural areas. Unless more money was received for rural calls, the department would discontinue services outside the city limits. Yet within the department, itself, the firemen admitted they did not mind answering rural calls, and said that another department would be a useless duplication of money and manpower. However, neither the City nor the County budged, and until the establishment of the St. Timothy Fire Department in 1971, newspapers reported the Conover Rural Fire District was serviced by the Conover Department on a per call basis. With the 1982 annexation of the western area which included a large portion of the St. Timothy tax base, the Conover department was once again servicing the rural areas of the district. (See the history of the St. Timothy Volunteer Fire Department for the intervening years, 1971-1982).

The majority of Conover's operating budget comes from the City. The fire tax for the area is only \$.01 per \$100 valuation, or approximately \$8000 per year. Last year alone, operating expenses for the two stations amounted to \$170,000. Fund raising was never a priority for the department. Prior to the appointment of a City Manager and establishment of an operating budget in approximately

History of Conover Volunteer Fire Department

1975, the department went to the City Council and requested equipment as the need arose. Fund raisers, such as hamburger sales, were held to purchase equipment not acquired through the channels of the City Council. Today the firemen park automobiles at the fairgrounds and are substantially reimbursed for their efforts. Chief Poovey stated that the parking was not solicited. Five years ago the legion was in "a bind." They asked the firemen to assist. The fireman obliged and have continued this service through the present. The department also holds raffles as their only other means of fund raising. When the organization needs a new appliance, two are purchased. Tickets are raffled to pay for both purchases. One item is given as a prize; the other is retained by the department.

Chief Poovey is proud of his department's fire record. He stresses the volunteers' willingness to give their time and risk their lives in the line of duty. With 227 fire calls answered between the two stations last year, property loss of \$40,000 amounted to only \$180 per fire. The record, as well as the Class 5 insurance rating, is impressive considering the tremendous amount of industry located in Conover. The Chief attributes much of the success to mandated sprinkler systems and fire brigades within the industries. However before the establishment of the Fire Marshal's office, the Conover Department provided classes in first aid and plant fire fighting as a service to their community.

The firemen recently began several new and innovative programs. One of these is the Junior Fire Department Program. It gives aspiring young persons, aged 16 to 18, the chance to complete the required training and observe in-house fire procedures prior to legal fire fighting age. When they turn 18, these young adults can immediately begin to tackle blazes. In addition, the Conover Department adopted the certification training and guidelines of the national Fire Protection Association in 1979. The training has recently been endorsed by the N.C. State Fire Commission. Chief Poovey also explains that his organization has also acquired "the most modern radio equipment money can buy," purchased turnout gear mandated by Occupational Safety and Health, and converted to National Standard Threads. "We are not in a catch-up game anymore," states the Chief. "From 1990, we're going to be on an operating budget."



Conover assists with a vehicular accident



HISTORY OF CONOVER #2 (FORMERLY ST. TIMOTHY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT)

The Conover Rural Fire District Committee was formed in response to an ultimatum given the County Commissioners by the City of Conover. The City announced it was losing money on calls answered outside city limits. Unless paid more money per call by the County, the City threatened to discontinue services outside of town limits.¹ In addition to the regular reimbursement received from the County, Conover began collecting a fee for each fire call answered to compensate for their loss.² Local residents report the fee was anywhere from \$75 to \$200. Talk of an increase in the per call fee after June of 1971, prompted residents to take immediate action.

A Conover Rural Fire Fund Committee was formed in the fall of 1970. They, along with several County Commissioners, approached an established rural department and requested that a satellite station be formed in the Conover Rural District. Fire Marshal David A. Yount and members of the committee stated that sufficient money was available in the proposed area to organize and maintain a new station. After several months of consideration, the rural department declined, but offered to help organize and train volunteers once a station was established.

The Conover Rural Fire District Committee which consisted of Chairman Grover Herman, Vance Hollar, Claude Hefner, Michael Rowe, and Paul Bolick called a meeting to discuss fire protection on February 10, 1971. Fifty-eight area residents voted to begin formulating plans for a new fire department. The new department would service the rural area formerly covered by Conover. A Board of Directors, including Dwight Rockett, Nelson Sigmon, and Dewey Hunsucker were elected to serve with the original Rural Committee.

Numerous meetings were held in the spring of 1971 to finalize organizational plans for the department. Advice was offered by Captain Harry Yount of the Hickory Fire Department and Fire Marshal Yount. On March 15, 1971, the organization was chartered as the St. Timothy Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. One week later, Nelson Sigmon was elected the department's first chief, a position he held for many years until replaced by Charles Sigmon.

Community and industrial support of the new department was tremendous. Carvassers solicited the area to be served and in only three weeks obtained \$31,500 in cash and pledges. An immediate expenditure of \$41,500 was approved by the membership of the district at a meeting at St. John's Lutheran Church.

Firemen held an organizational meeting at St. Stephens Fire Department where officers were elected for the coming year. A fifty hour training course held at the same department was attended by fifty volunteers. During May of 1971, the Ladies Auxiliary was also organized.

Herman Sipe and Company built and rented a brick fire station to the new department. Shortly thereafter, the organization was able to purchase the same

¹ "Maiden, Conover Departments Differ from Others in County," Observer News Enterprise, July 5, 1979.

² Firemen's News. Vol. 2, No. 14, April, 1971.

History of Conover #2 (formerly St. Timothy Fire Department)

new station. It was financed for a number of years because, as one fireman stated, "you can't take the building to the fire scene." Equipment valued at \$60,000 was purchased and paid for during the first year. Purchases included a new 1971 Ward-LaFrance 1,000 gallon diesel pumper, a 1971 International 1,200 gallon tanker, a military surplus brush buggy, as well as needed additional firefighting equipment.

Firemen were not eligible for a \$5,000 death benefit until they were insurance rated. A 9AA four mile radius insurance rating was obtained for the St. Timothy Fire District in 1972.

Firemen submitted a petition to the County in September, 1972, for the purpose of levying a fire tax. Residents of the area approved the new tax on March 31, 1973. A fire tax of \$.07 per \$100 valuation was levied, and decreased to approximately \$.06 the following year. Taxation remained at \$.06 per \$100 valuation for an additional five years, and then dropped to \$.046 until the department was relinquished.

The monthly proceeds from the fire tax were used to cover operating expenses and purchase additional equipment. With fire tax money, the department was able to purchase a 1974 Dodge mini-pumper, and a 1976 Kenworth 2,000 gpm pumper-tanker - the first of its type in the southeastern US. Firemen affectionately referred to the pumper-tanker as the "Big K-T." The department also acquired a new 1979 Kenworth 2,000 gpm pumper-tanker with remote controlled 1,000 gpm nozzle, and ordered a 1983 GMC 1250 gallon tanker.

In 1982, the City of Conover involuntarily annexed a part of the St. Timothy District. The St. Timothy Board of Directors had two options. They could continue to function without the annexed portion of their tax base, or enter into a merger with Conover. Agonizing over the choices, the directors decided that the merger was better for the people as a whole. Directors reasoned that taxes from the recently annexed industries within the area had helped them purchase essential firefighting equipment. They speculated it would be unfair to totally divorce themselves from the annexed industrial areas which had helped them, through fire taxation, obtain much of their firefighting equipment.

The city assumed control of St. Timothy's debts which included an insubstantial amount owed on a pumper-tanker, as well as a substantial amount owed on the fire station. They also assumed total financial responsibility for a recently ordered tanker. In return, they were given St. Timothy assets amounting to approximately \$500,000.

Terms of the merger stated that Conover would provide the same quality service to the area at approximately the same fire tax rate. However, when Conover took control of the St. Timothy operation, the tax rate increased to \$.074 per \$100 valuation. The issue was later resolved when residents were guaranteed a fire tax rate of \$.01 for five years to rectify the discrepancy.

History of Conover #2 (formerly St. Timothy Fire Department)

Although Conover changed the name of the St. Timothy Department to Conover No. 2, the firefighters and board members remained basically the same. Shortly after the merger, former St. Timothy fireman, Paul Yount, was elected district chief of the Conover Fire Department No. 2. The District Chief, Board of Directors, and firemen meet regularly with Conover Chief Povey to keep open the lines of communication. The Conover No. 2 Volunteer Fire Department still provides quality service to the residents of the St. Timothy and Conover Fire Districts which is second to none.



HISTORY OF THE COOKSVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The community of Cooksville held a meeting on March 2, 1967, to discuss fire protection in the Cooksville area. During the meeting, a letter was read from the County Attorney who suggested an eighth rural volunteer firefighting unit be established in the area. Prior to the establishment of the Cooksville organization, fire coverage was provided by the Propst Crossroads Department. Since a large part of the Cooksville community was located outside of a four mile radius of the Propst Department, Cooksville residents believed their fire protection needs could best be met by a department of their own. Harry Yount of the Hickory Fire Department supplied information concerning the requirements and equipment needed for the organization. At the same meeting, Voyt Rudisill was appointed temporary chairman of the organization. The group also designated a committee responsible for obtaining a state charter of incorporation which was eventually finalized on August 14, 1967.

The community met again on March 16, 1967. They elected a Board of Directors led by Voyt Rudisill. Mr. Rudisill together with Marshall Skull donated a one acre tract of land for the new fire station. At the same time, Blackwalder Oil contributed a gas tanker and pump for use until the department could acquire its own equipment. A building committee was appointed by the Board of Directors to begin plans for a new fire station. A finance committee immediately began work on fundraising activities, and held a supper on April 1, 1967.

Numerous fundraisers were held in 1967. In September, the organization raised almost \$400 from the gate and concessions of a horse show held in conjunction with Bancak Stables. Shooting matches, along with the department's traditional fruitcake sale, provided extra funds in October. Since then, the firemen have held bi-annual barbecue suppers. Proceeds from this fundraiser contribute to the operating expenses of the department and enable the firemen to purchase additional needed equipment. The income from a barbecue supper held in 1970, allowed firemen to make a downpayment on a new truck. Firemen are assisted in their fundraising efforts by the Ladies Auxiliary who also hold bake sales and Stanley parties to raise money for the department.

After the organization established boundaries with Propst Fire Department and finalized papers of incorporation in August, members and officers of the new department were elected. Twenty men became volunteers, and were led by Graydon Strawser, the department's first chief. He was replaced by Tom Wise in 1969. Vernon Rhoney, a nineteen year veteran of the department, assumed the post in 1974. He holds the position at present.

In 1968, the department acquired additional equipment. The County loaned a 1941 Ford pumper to the firemen. When the vehicle was obtained, the fire station was still under construction so the truck was housed in a resident's shed. Shortly thereafter, the department purchased a 1960 1,000 gallon tanker from an oil company.

A 1969 tax levy enabled the department to obtain essential operating equipment. The organization decided that 40% of the department's operating costs would come from the fire tax. A rate of \$.035 per \$100 valuation was levied during the following year and has since increased slightly to \$.04 per \$100 valuation. With the tax money, the firemen purchased a 1945 Dodge Army

History of the Cocksville Volunteer Fire Department

vehicle and used it as a brush truck, and a new 1971 750 gpm American LaFrance pumper. The new pumper replaced the 1941 model loaned by the County, and enabled the district to be fire rated. The department also acquired a new 1975 Chevrolet brush truck with a 210 gallon tank which replaced the 1945 Army vehicle, and a new 1977 Ford pumper-tanker with a 1,500 gallon water capacity. The Ladies Auxiliary contributed \$1,000 to the department for the purchase of the new pumper-tanker.

The fire house was declared debt-free, and a note burning was held on May 23, 1970. Eight years later, the station was enlarged to double its original size.

Although tax monies support many of the operational expenses of the department, firemen still rely heavily on fundraisers. The 28 volunteers are determined to provide the best possible fire coverage at the lowest possible cost to residents.



HISTORY OF THE FAIRBROOK VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Fairbrook Volunteer Fire Department was organized when the Hickory Fire Department announced that it could no longer provide fire coverage to the rural areas of the County after June 30, 1957. The subject of fire protection was first discussed among members of the Hi-Neighbor Club in late 1957. Over one hundred residents attended the first organizational meeting held on January 6, 1958, at Temple Baptist Church. During a gathering on January 13th, three officers and twelve directors were elected. A meeting of the board was held at the home of President Corbin Green where solicitations, equipment and building committees were selected. The group agreed to meet weekly until a fire department was functional. As a result of their efforts, Fairbrook Volunteer Fire Department No. 3 - a name derived from a combination of Fairgrove and Brookford - became the third rural volunteer department in the County.

Appointed committees immediately went to work securing funding, equipment, and a site for the new station. By March of 1958, over \$5,000 in cash and pledges had been received, and a 1958 GMC truck with a 500 gpm Howe 3 stage pump was ordered. Several weeks later, land for a fire station was leased to the organization by Mrs. Zena Barger. A bid of approximately \$4,200 by the Moser and Shook Lumber Company was accepted at the end of April, and a per call contract was signed with the County in the same month. Directors held their June meeting in the completed fire station which was debt free by the following month. In July, the new \$10,000 Howe pumper arrived, and directors agreed to pay the remaining \$5,000 balance in monthly \$500 increments.

Meanwhile, the directors acquired a KB-10 five ton International Truck. They installed a 1,000 gallon surplus tank on the chassis, and converted this unit into a tanker for \$225. The truck, affectionately known as "Old Iron Sides," has since been sold to the Bandys Fire Department. In October, an Open House was held to display the new station and equipment.

Much of the department's success is attributed to its foresight. The Board of Directors appointed Rupert Lewis as the department's first chief in August. During the early months of his tenure, directors investigated the possibility of levying a fire tax in their district to meet the operating expenses of the department. Tax monies would appreciably supplement fire call revenues from the County, donations by the community, and annual fundraisers such as fair booths and barbecues sponsored by firemen. A petition calling for a fire tax election was circulated among residents of the district in May of 1959, and the necessary signatures were obtained. A tax of \$.05 per \$100 valuation was requested from the citizenry.

Fairbrook met with the County Commissioners, Planning Board, and representatives of other rural departments to discuss how to proceed with the election. County Manager George Wilkinson expressed a concern that the amount of tax realized would not justify administrative costs. The only conclusion drawn from the meeting was that rural departments should maintain control of their own operations. If Fairbrook wanted to tax itself more equally to distribute the financial burden, most present believed they should not be discouraged because they had a legal right to do so. The community voted in favor of the proposal in the fall of 1960, and became the first district in the County to levy a tax.

History of Fairbrook Volunteer Fire Department

The revenues which resulted from the fire tax enabled the new department to make needed modifications in their equipment and station. The department obtained a new 99 year lease from Mrs. Barger in October of 1961. A loan of \$10,000 at 5% interest was acquired to enlarge the existing station. A second level complete with kitchen, meeting room, storage rooms, bathrooms, and offices was constructed for approximately \$14,300. The Ladies Auxiliary sold dishcloths and held bake sales to equip the new kitchen and purchase additional needed items for firefighters. After completing the addition to the fire station, firemen sought and obtained a 9AA Insurance Rating.

When Chief Ken Kahill took office in 1962, the department was extremely busy, answering calls as far away as Brookford. Eventually, the Town of Brookford entered into a contract with Fairbrook whereby the department was paid \$75 per fire call. Several years later, the Brookford town limits were extended, and the Mountain View Fire Department responded to calls in the Brookford community. As other volunteer departments were organized in the County, the territory serviced by the Fairbrook Department decreased.

As the area expanded, more firefighting equipment was needed. A tanker equipped by Oran Roanoke Corporation was purchased for approximately \$10,000 in August, and delivered in January, 1965. A panel truck suited for the transport of firefighting equipment was acquired for \$2,000 in the following year.

Firemen were discontent with their once-a-month meetings. On the recommendation of Chief Kahill, the Board of Directors decided to purchase a piece of property on the Catawba River for recreational purposes. The land was acquired at a cost of \$2,800. Finances for the lot came from fundraisers and donations. The property was sold several years later, and a recreational room, built by firemen, was constructed on the side of the fire station.

Gene Houser was employed as the department's first full-time salaried fireman. He originally worked a nine hour day for \$80 per week. Although he was asked to serve as chief of the department in 1969, he declined, but agreed to continue as an employee. Wardell Dettar accepted the position becoming the department's first full-time salaried chief. However, after he left the position, the department employed only one full-time salaried fireman.

At the annual meeting in 1971, President Bollinger stated that new equipment was required to keep up with expanding commercialization in the district. Therefore, the tax rate was increased to \$.10 per \$100 valuation in order to purchase a new pumper and retire payments in a reasonable amount of time. An American LaFrance 1,500 gpm pumper was ordered in April, 1971, and received in January, 1972. Total cost of the new pumper was approximately \$50,000.

Raymond Townsend replaced Chief Dettar in 1972. He inherited many of the ongoing concerns of the department. In 1972, the City of Hickory annexed one-third of the Fairbrook tax base, leaving the department bewildered. One-third of their revenues were gone. By 1973, the department had to raise tax rates to \$.12 per \$100 valuation because they were in a financial bind.

History of Fairbrook Volunteer Fire Department

The department had twice secured loans during the preceding year to meet operating expenses. In an effort to conserve funds, payments on the new pumper were lowered.

The financial position substantially improved over the next several years and the organization was able to purchase new equipment. In late 1973, the department purchased a surplus Army truck for use as a water tanker at a cost of \$400. A 2,000 gallon tank was installed on the chassis. After nineteen months of service, the chassis of the tanker was replaced with a 1973 International 4300 Transtor tractor for approximately \$30,000. In 1977, the department acquired a van which carried rescue equipment. In the same year a White Road Boss 2 which served as a pumper-tanker and carried over 2,100 gallons of water was purchased for \$109,000. The unit, designed to meet the specialized needs of the commercialized community, has exceeded the expectations of all. A Dodge van was acquired for transportation to training schools and activities in 1983, and a new Suburban carry-all was purchased for use as a command vehicle in 1987.

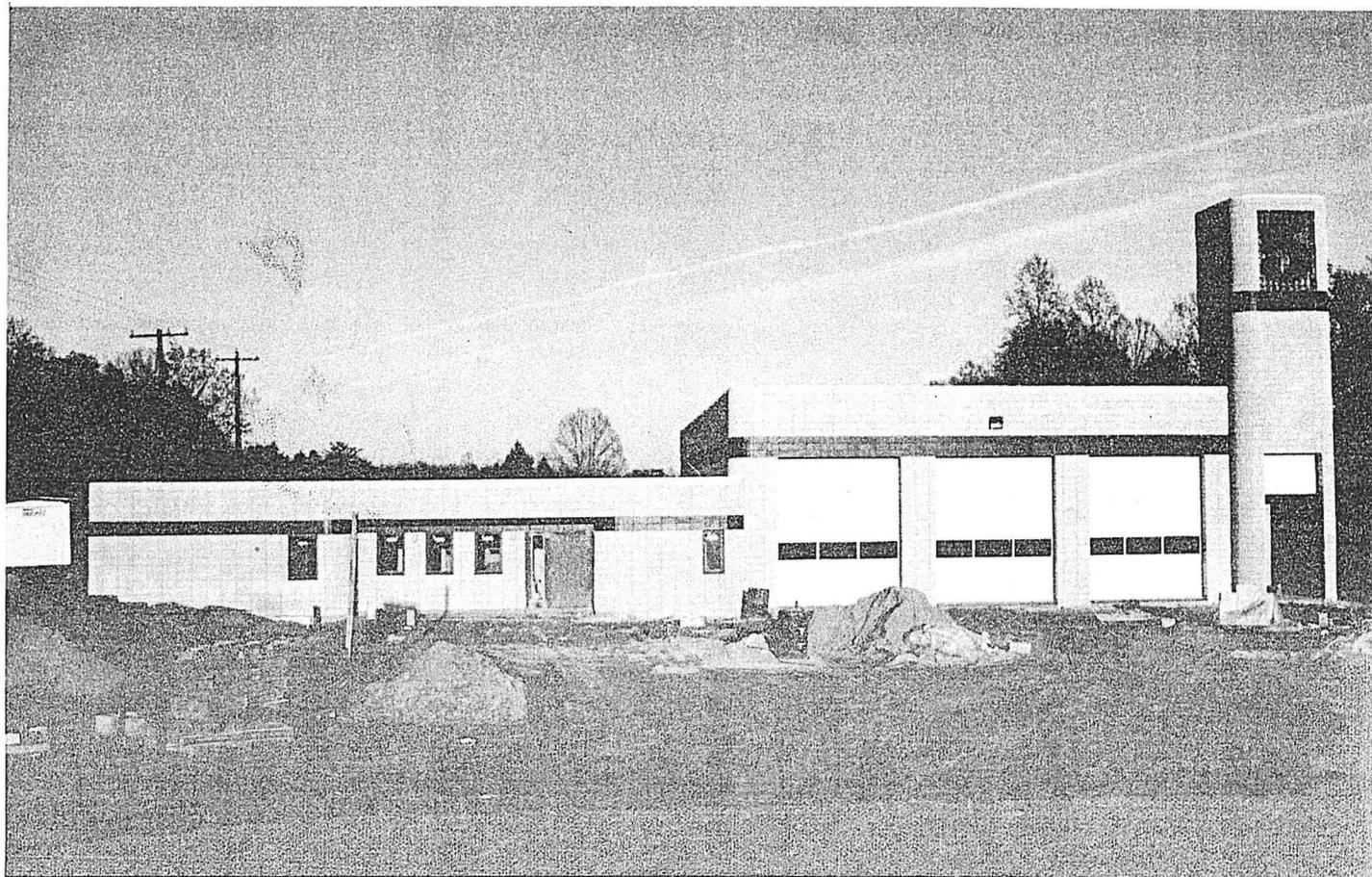
The last decade of the department's history has been marked by strong leaders. Wade Kahill replaced Raymond Townsend as Chief in 1978. In 1980, Mr. Townsend once again retained the position. He was presented an award for twenty-five years of continuous service when Fairbrook celebrated its 25th Anniversary in July of 1982. Gene Houser, the department's long-time paid engineer, was elected chief in 1981, and currently hold the position. Chief Houser states that the department has been blessed with good leaders - directors and chiefs - who had been "common sense people" and delegate responsibility without alienating others with their authority.

When necessary, Chief Houser seeks the advice of former chiefs. He recalls requesting advice from former Chief Ken Kahill, affectionately known as "Pappy", when Hickory annexed more of the Fairbrook territory. The department was considering a merger-contract with the Hickory Department. Firemen and citizens were unsure of just what was occurring. "Firemen were losing interest and torn up." stated Chief Houser. "Pappy" advised the Chief to keep the best interests of the people in mind, and to remain a part of the growing community. Foremost, he suggested that the Chief tell the people the truth. The resulting merger-contract with the City of Hickory on March 15, 1985, was beneficial to both parties. In exchange for Fairbrook's fire coverage of the annexed area, Hickory reimburses Fairbrook for the lost tax base with an equal amount of revenue. Hickory also provides two full-time driver-engineers for the department, in addition to Fairbrook's full-time paid chief. The three individuals alternate twenty-four hour shifts. Hickory is also building a new fire station for Fairbrook under the terms of this contract. Fireman should be in the new building by May of the current year. Shortly after the merger, Fairbrook lowered its insurance classification from a 7 to a 6. The area currently maintains a tax rate of \$.055 per \$100 valuation.

The men are involved in many community activities. They teach fire prevention in local schools and nursing homes, and also participate in fire prevention week. Chief Houser believes his department's greatest asset is comraderie among the thirty-seven volunteers and three paid firemen. They work closely together making the community a better place in which to live.



Fairbrook in action in a 1966 fire



Fairbrook's new ultra modern facilities

HISTORY OF THE HICKORY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Firefighting in Hickory was first begun in 1886 with a bucket brigade. When a fire alarm sounded, volunteers ran to the fire scene with a bucket in their hand.

Another firefighting group known as "the rescue" was organized in 1882. They purchased buckets and ladders, and stored them on a wagon which was manually pushed to the fire scene unless a horse was found. Volunteers collected rain water and stored it in cisterns strategically located around the town.

The town installed water works on the request of firemen. In 1905, one year before the city water system was completed, the volunteers officially organized the Hickory Fire Department. A horse and wagon were immediately purchased as transportation for the unit, and a second horse was added several years later. Firemen struggled to secure hay and oats so horses could be fed.

In 1913, the City purchased a motorized truck with a pumper for the fire department. The vehicle was the first of its type in this part of the state. Firemen decided to see if the new fire truck could beat the horse-drawn wagon to a fire scene. The wagon won because the streets were extremely muddy when the race occurred. White in color, the new pumper carried the mud scars of the race until it was painted red in 1920.

Hickory Fire Department minutes indicate Harry Whitener became chief in 1915. He was replaced by A.T. Yoder in 1916, but several years later, Harry Whitener assumed the position once again and held it until Donald E. Shuford became chief.

The original department was housed in the Old Hickory City Hall. The department headquarters remained here until a new building was constructed in 1961.

A second pumper was added to the vehicle count in 1918, and not a moment too soon. A series of plant fires swept the area between 1920 and 1926, and caused the addition of a third pumper in approximately 1925. Another new truck was acquired in 1936.

During the early 1920s, the Hickory Volunteer Fire Department fought approximately 25 fires per year. By 1946, the number had jumped to 223, with annual losses amounting to \$27,000.

The volunteers installed a fire alarm system in 1924. By 1947, 79 communication boxes had been installed over all parts of the city. In the same year, the department could boast of 55 volunteers and an operating budget of over \$25,000, provided by the City of Hickory.

In 1947, Volunteer Chief Donald E. Shuford called for financial assistance to expand the services of the fire department because of the city's tremendous growth. He stated that no bond issue had ever been used to purchase firefighting equipment - all funding had come from the city budget. During the tenure of Chief Shuford, the city added two modern outlying stations. One was located in East Hickory, and the other in West Hickory.

History of the Hickory Fire Department

After serving as chief for over twenty years, Donald E. Shuford resigned and was replaced by Captain Earl G. Moser, better known as "Gus," in January, 1954. Chief Moser became the first uniformed full-time chief in the history of the department. He had served as captain of the organization for ten years, and had been a full-time "man" for twenty-three years. The chief immediately went to work. In 1955, Hickory residents received good news. Their fire insurance classification was lowered to a 4. By 1961, the classification again dropped to of 3.

Under the guidance of Chief Moser, the organization grew. By 1961, the department owned six pumpers and two ladder trucks. Thirty-six full-time firemen, sixteen part-time firemen, and eight volunteers responded to fire alarms. Volunteers remained with the department until 1967. In addition, Chief Moser was assisted in his duties by two assistant chiefs, and seven captains. Full-time firemen manned the station eighty-four hours a week. One hundred and eighty-five fire alarm boxes had been placed throughout the city and were connected to sprinkler systems.

Captain Harry Yount led the department's training program. In 1960, firemen spent yearly totals of 3724 hours in the class-room study of firefighting, 736 hours in practice drills, 321 hours in the survey of buildings, and 148 hours on pre-fire planning. Furthermore, firemen had organized fire brigades in all major industrial plants, and had assisted with the training of firefighters in newly organized rural departments of the county.

During this time, Captain Larson Moore headed the fight for fire prevention. Under his watchful eye, the city adopted a Fire Prevention Code and Fire Prevention Bureau in 1954. Inspections of schools and places of public assembly were made, and educational fire prevention programs were held in the early 1960s.

Chief Moser retired in 1978, and was replaced by Larson Moore. During his tenure, Chief Moore has accomplished many feats. He developed an arson team, and a physical fitness program for firemen. A nine member HAZMAT team was formed in September, 1984. When completely developed, the team will answer chemical spill calls, respond to emergency accidents, evacuate people, contain spills, and identify material. The group has obtained over \$11,000 in equipment including exotic chemical suits and air monitors. Although they respond to minor accidents now, the group should be fully developed and trained in four more years.

Because of annexation, the City of Hickory has developed several contracts and contract/mergers with volunteer fire departments in the county. Contract/mergers with Fairbrook and Viewmont Volunteer Fire Departments have been beneficial for all concerned. Hickory saves money on manpower and equipment. The volunteer departments are reimbursed their lost tax base, give additional full-time manpower, and furnished with new fire stations. A new fire house for Fairbrook should be completed in May, 1988. Plans for a new station are currently underway in Viewmont. When these projects are completed, Hickory will own six stations across the City.

History of the Hickory Fire Department

The Hickory Fire Department has budgeted for a new truck in the coming year. \$475,000 has been set aside for a 1988 Aerial Platform truck.

Chief Moore will retire in several months after thirty-four years of service. He states that a strong camaraderie exists among the 87 firemen of the Hickory Department. He explains that very rarely does one get paid for something he likes to do, and make so many lifelong friends in the process. Chief Moore will be replaced by Thomas S. Hardin.

HISTORY OF LONG VIEW VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Long View Volunteer Fire Department was organized on August 9, 1952, during a time when citizens across Catawba County demanded more adequate fire protection from their County and municipalities. Prior to organization, the fire protection needs of Long View residents were provided by the Hickory Fire Department. When the Long View Lions Club met at Long View School to establish the volunteer fire department, Hickory firemen Harry Yount and Chief Donald Shuford offered to help train new firefighters. At the same meeting, Eugene C. Annas was elected the department's first chief.

As more volunteers joined the force, the primary goal of the new organization became the building of a new town office and fire house. The one-bay station became a reality with volunteer labor and donated materials. In 1952, the new department went into service with the acquisition of a 1914 pumper leased from the City of Hickory for \$1.00 a year.

The fledgling department lacked the necessary funds to purchase a minimal amount of firefighting equipment. Observing the County Commissioners' generosity to other municipalities, Long View Mayor Dewey Houston appeared before the Board of Commissioners in March of 1953. He requested \$1,730 for the purchase of a new hose needed by the fire department. The Commissioners took the request under advisement.

Shortly thereafter, donations and fund raisers provided the necessary funding for the purchase of the first department-owned pumper, a used 1951 Dodge. The leased truck was returned to Hickory. At the close of 1953, Chief Annas resigned and was replaced by Charlie Lail.

The Long View Department entered into a contract with the County in the mid 1950s. In exchange for a fee, the department answered fire calls outside the city limits. In 1955, Charles Davis, Jr., County Planning Engineer, drew fire protection boundaries for municipalities under contract with the County. Rural residents, including those of Long View, were instructed to call the fire department within their district's boundaries if fire service was required.

Charles Eggers replaced Chief Lail in May, 1956. Under his leadership, firemen collected enough money through donations and fund raisers to purchase a new 750 gpm pumper.

The department was infused with new life in January of 1962 when the Town of Long View assumed control of the department and hired two full-time firemen. One of these men, Ernest E. Riley, Sr., was hired as the department's first full-time chief in September, 1960. Chief Riley remembers that one of the first "full-timers" worked between the fire and police departments. Russell T. Robinson was elected chief when the Town assumed control in 1962, and served the department in this capacity until his retirement in September of 1980.

Under the Town's supervision, the department immediately lowered the Class 9 fire insurance rate to a Class 7 because of improved Town water lines. In approximately 1985, the rating dropped to 5/9A, since the water lines were extended outside the town limits. With the new rating, any rural area within 1000 feet of a fire hydrant qualified for the Town's insurance classification of 5 which was originally obtained in 1982.

History of the Long View Volunteer Fire Department

The department relied primarily on the generosity of the Town Board for operating costs and equipment until the mid 1970s. Other sources of income came through donations, fund raisers, and small County call payments. In November of 1967, the department accepted an American LaFrance bid for a new 1000 gpm pumper. The new piece of equipment was delivered in October, 1968, and was used only for fires inside the town limits. Exceptions were made for mutual aid calls. In 1970, firemen asked the Town to enlarge a water tank on their Dodge truck which was specified for use in grass and County fires.

Departmental minutes reveal Chief Robinson was contacted by a Burke County Fire Official in June of 1970. He was asked if the Icard Township Fire Department could absorb a four mile radius covered by the Long View Department. The firemen decided to release the property if the residents of the discussed area wanted fire coverage from the Icard Department. Eventually, the area was lost.

In June, 1973, the County proposed to pay the department \$200 per month for rural calls. According to records, the fireman agreed the amount was sufficient because of the small amount of rural calls. The Town Board accepted the proposal.

The levying of a district fire tax in 1973 provided additional funds for the Long View Department. At the same time, the area formerly known as the Long View Rural District was renamed the West Catawba Fire District. According to current Chief Riley, the tax was originally \$.05 per \$100 valuation, then dropped to \$.04. The tax rate for this service district is set by the County. Today, since all needed equipment has been purchased, the rate is only \$.026 per \$100 valuation. Yet the Town still provides more departmental funding than does the County.

With the advent of fire taxes, the organization no longer needed the proceeds from fund raisers. However, the small but active Ladies Auxiliary still holds hot dog sales in addition to serving refreshments at meetings and fires.

Population, housing, and industrial growth provided the impetus for the purchase of a new 1250 gallon pumper with a 50 foot telesquirt in 1975. Two years later, a 1200 gallon tanker was acquired to better serve the community. The department is currently anticipating the arrival of a new 1988 1000 gpm pumper ordered in October of last year.

The Long View Department is quite active in community service. A fire safety program is held by paid and volunteer firemen once a month at each of the two local schools. Prizes are awarded to youngsters who present the best posters and essays promoting fire safety. The 4-H fire safety program, begun in the 1970s, is still offered to fourth graders. The organization eagerly participates in Fire Prevention Week with displays and puppet shows. Public and industrial seminars held by firemen teach community members the importance of fire safety.

Chief Riley believes the greatest asset of the department is its volunteers.



History of the Long View Volunteer Fire Department

"We couldn't get along without them," he says. Currently the department has five salaried full-time firemen and seventeen volunteers. These men fight approximately 95 fires per year.

HISTORY OF THE MAIDEN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Town of Maiden was the third municipality in Catawba County to form a volunteer fire department. The department was organized on October 30, 1921, and led by Chief John Hefner Sr. The fire station was located in the Old City Hall building where the present City Hall structure now stands. In 1922, the department purchased its first vehicle - a Model-T Ford with solid rubber tires known affectionately as "Ole Sal."

Chief Hefner was replaced by Lee Harbinson who was followed by Dodd Finger Sr. Doc Campbell became the department's third chief until Dodd Finger was named to the post once again. The Town purchased a 1917 American LaFrance pumper in September of 1932.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the department desperately needed a new fire truck. According to current Chief Poovey, who spoke with Mrs. Dodd Finger several years ago, "you had to push off the old 1920s truck to get it cranked when a fire occurred." But because of a metal shortage resulting from World War II, a new truck could not be ordered. After the war ended, the town purchased a 1945 Chevrolet pumper.

Maiden Mayor Banks Whisnant appeared before County Commissioners in May of 1953, reported the Newton Observer. He requested the county enter into a contract with Maiden similar to the one recently entered into by the county with the City of Newton. The county agreed, and purchased one of the Maiden fire trucks, the 1945 Chevrolet pumper, for use in rural fire calls. Mayor Whisnant stated the truck had been driven only 1700 miles. The county paid for the truck on a five year installment plan. In addition, the county continued to pay Maiden \$75 per rural call answered. The Mayor also said the Town would dispose of the old 1922 Model-T, and purchase a new fire truck.

Immediately thereafter, the Town acquired a new 1953 500 gpm Ford pumper. A new fire chief, former Mayor Whisnant, was appointed in 1953. During the second year of his term, Maiden's rural fire service district was outlined by the county to avoid the duplication of service and payment. In 1957, Dr. C.P. Kyles became chief. He was succeeded by Howard Campbell in 1963. Three years later, the Town purchased a new 750 gpm Ford pumper.

In 1970, the department moved to a new home across the street from Town Hall. The new station was constructed for approximately \$60,000. Five-hundred citizens attended the dedication services of the new fire house in November.

Chief Howard Campbell retired in 1971, after thirty-one years of volunteer firefighting service to the community. Clyde Finger was named as his replacement. During the tenure of Chief Finger, a new 1974 750 gpm pumper was acquired for the rural district. A 2000 gallon tanker was purchased by the Town.

The Town of Maiden funded the majority of fire costs for areas outside of the Town limits until 1973. The state informed the county and town that municipal funds should not be used to cover firefighting costs in rural areas. A petition to levy a fire tax on the outlying areas was submitted to the county in October of 1972. Six months later, residents approved the proposal. The fire levied on rural residents has remained between \$.03 and \$.02 per \$100 valuation for the last fifteen years.

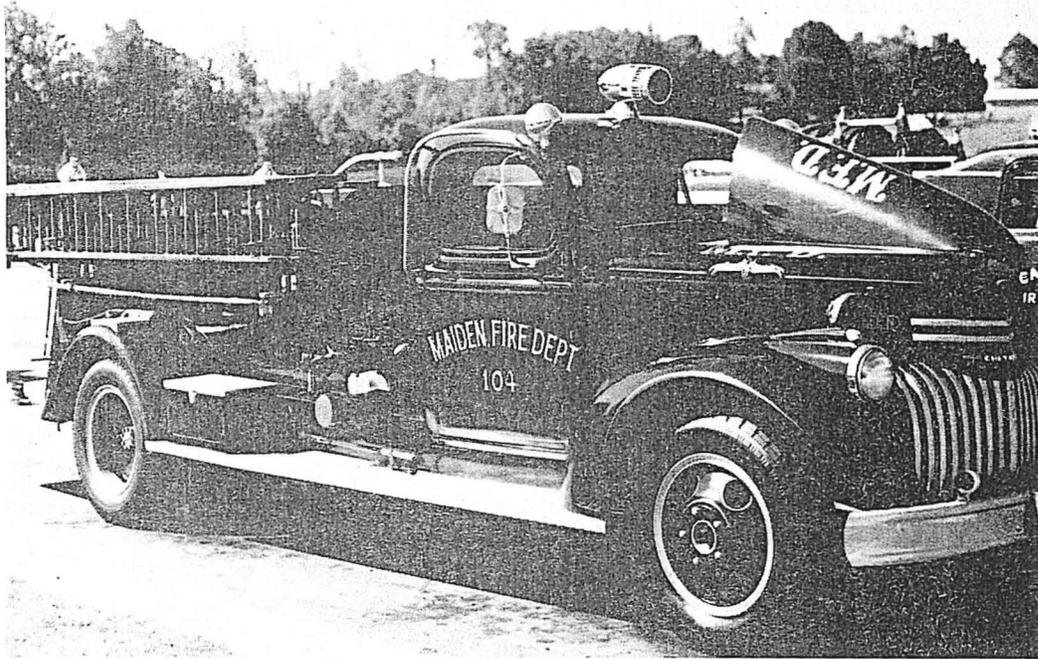
Under the guidance of Brent Bauguess, elected chief in 1975, the Maiden Rural Fire Department was formed to serve the area outside of Town limits. This area, called the Brentwood Fire District, was named after Chief Bauguess. The rural department formed its own Board of eight Directors and entered into a unique fire protection contract with the governing body of the Maiden Volunteer Fire Department, the Town council. Town volunteers, together with rural volunteers, respond to rural fire alarms. However, the rural department is funded by Brentwood Fire District taxes, and rural firefighting equipment is purchased with this revenue. Both departments are housed in the same Town station, and led by the same chief and officers.

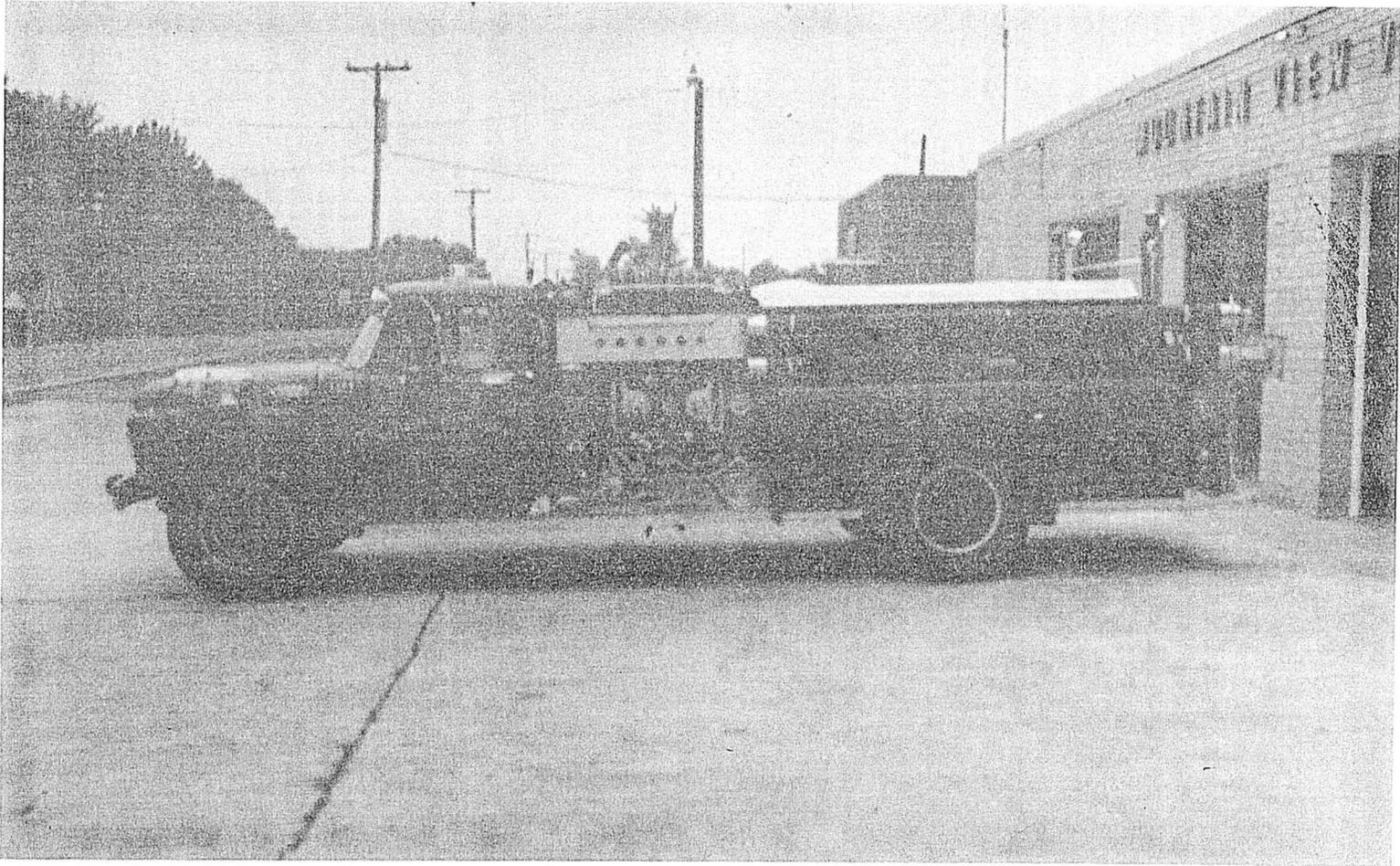
Maiden retained a new 1250 gpm diesel pumper in 1976, and a new chief, Bill Rose, in the following year. The city purchased a new equipment van in 1979, and a new rural 1980 four-wheel drive brush truck replaced the older model which was sold to Startown.

Under the watchful eye of current Chief Bob Poovey, elected in 1979, many improvements were made in the Town and rural districts. Approximately five years ago, the Town of Maiden updated its water system with a reservoir on Maiden Creek. New water lines from a central tank have provided additional needed pressure. The renovated water system, along with the diligent work of the firemen, caused a reduction in fire insurance premiums for residents. The Town was given one of the lowest insurance classifications in the county - a 5 - approximately three years ago. Shortly thereafter, the insurance classification of the Brentwood Rural Fire District was dropped to a 7.

During Chief Poovey's tenure, the department has also purchased several new vehicles. A new 1250 gpm Quality Town pumper with 500 gallon booster tanker was received in 1986. The rural department is anxiously awaiting the arrival of a new 2000 gallon tanker.

Chief Poovey attributes the success of his department to the close working relationship among the Board of Directors, Town Council, and volunteers. When the ten rural and twenty-five city firefighters need any type of equipment or assistance, Chief Poovey states, "all they have to do is ask." The governing bodies of both departments meet all major monetary firefighting needs. The firefighters and Ladies Auxiliary hold an annual street dance in May, and this year held their first barbecue, and hope to make it a yearly event. The proceeds are used to purchase items needed by the firemen.





HISTORY OF THE MOUNTAIN VIEW VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

During the fall of 1961, a group of residents from the Mt. View and Propst Crossroads communities held a meeting at the Mt. View Home Demonstration Clubhouse to discuss the possibility of forming a volunteer fire department to cover both areas which were without fire protection. The group decided each community should form their own department. Mt. View citizens gathered for subsequent meetings in the auditorium of the Mt. View Elementary School.

The local department was chartered by the State of North Carolina as a non-profit organization in January, 1962. It was named the Mountain View Volunteer Fire Department No. 4 of Catawba County, Inc. Pledge cards were distributed throughout the community in early 1962. Land for the site of the new fire station was donated by two area residents, Mrs. A.P. Whitener and Mrs. Maude McCaslin. Citizens of the community selected firemen and continued their solicitation for funds. In the spring of 1963, the residents began cutting timber for the new station after they collected \$4,000 in donations and pledges. The lumber was milled for the firehouse which would be located on a one-acre tract of land next to Highway 127 South. The new fire station was constructed for a mere \$2,000. The members of the community donated the remainder of the materials and labor. The end result was a two-bay brick block building with squad room, built almost entirely by volunteer labor.

The first piece of equipment purchased by Mt. View residents was a used 1952 1,000 gallon water tanker. The citizens liquidated the debt on the tanker and building before they ordered a new 750 gpm American LaFrance pumper which arrived on November 4, 1963. The department began servicing the community the following day.

For two years, Ernest Link served as the department's first chief. He asked two volunteers to stay at the fire station every night in case of calls. This practice was discontinued several months later when a countywide radio system was installed.

Eddie Whitsner was elected chief in 1964. He guided the department through its formative stage, and served as chief for twenty-one years. During his tenure, an overwhelming majority of the community reaffirmed their support for the department when a fire tax was levied in 1966. At this time, passage of the tax was essential to the department because the Mt. View-Baker's Mountain Community was one of the fastest growing areas in Catawba County. More equipment was needed to service the community.

In 1969, a new 1,200 gallon tanker equipped with a pump and "quick-dump" valve was purchased. A four-wheel drive brush truck was also added. The combined cost of the two vehicles was approximately \$14,000. However, the increased vehicle count created a problem. The station was not large enough to house all of the equipment. In 1970, the problem was eliminated with the addition of three bays to the existing building. The same year, a new pumper-tanker was purchased for approximately \$23,000. The truck replaced the department's first piece of equipment, the 1952 tanker.

A busy year for the department was 1981. They acquired a new 1,000 gpm American LaFrance pumper which carried 750 gallons of water. The new pumper replaced the 1963 model which was now used as a drafting and supply truck. A

History of Mountain View Volunteer Fire Department

new gable roof replaced the existing leaky one on the firehouse. During the month of April, the North Carolina Safety Council presented a top safety award to Chief Eddie Whitener and his department for conducting a fire prevention campaign which encouraged the safe and proper use of woodstoves. In December, the firemen developed their "FFF Program." (Firemen's Fellowship and Familization) Under this program, the Mt. View department would invite neighboring departments to their station. Equipment would be displayed and ideas exchanged in an effort to bring departments closer together. Firemen would also better understand how each department operated.

During 1982, the department reconditioned their 1974 brush truck. For approximately \$12,000, the truck was made safer and more efficient. In July of the same year, Mt. View fireman Roy Waters was chosen as Fireman of the Year at the Annual Ladies Night Banquet.

Erroll Ward was elected chief in 1985, and has served as a volunteer with the Mt. View department for twenty-one years. During the second year of his term, the department had an addition built to the fire station since fire trucks had to be pulled from bays so meetings and training sessions could be held. The firemen, themselves, constructed the new addition which included a meeting and training room, kitchen, bathroom, and storage area. Cost of the addition was approximately \$48,000. The active Board of Directors who strongly support the department voted to contribute \$2,000 per year of fire tax money to retire the debt. The remainder is being paid by the firemen who hold biannual barbecues and an annual raffle. In addition, the Ladies Auxiliary holds bake sales during the spring and fall barbecues. The firemen serve over 1,000 pounds of barbecue at these outings, while the Ladies make approximately \$500 from each of their bake sales. Chief Ward stated that community support of the barbecues is excellent.

The department chose not to purchase a new tanker in 1987 because of a lack of resources. Instead, they opted to recondition the two existing tankers for a cost of \$30,000. Firemen needed two working tankers for the growing community. A new 1,250 gpm pumper which carried 1,000 gallons of water was finally ordered from Wolverine Fire Apparatus in 1988 to replace the out-dated 1963 pumper. The vehicle was designed to meet the special needs of the expanding residential community.

Chief Ward compare the running of a volunteer fire department to the running of a business. "Budgets, state and federal paperwork, and guidelines have to be followed." For this reason, the department purchased a computer for approximately \$3,000 in 1987. Because of the stringent technical demands made upon the volunteers, a fireman with the Mt. View department must be 18 years of age, and possess a high school education.

The current fire tax rate for the Mt. View community is \$.05 per \$100 valuation. The rate has fluctuated over the years. At one time, the rate had reached \$.07, then dropped to \$.03, until the current level was obtained. The Chief hopes to reduce the tax, since plans for insurance reclassification are complete.

History of Mt. View Volunteer Fire Department

The department began its quest to lower insurance rates approximately five years ago. Much time and expense went into training, paperwork, and burying tanks across the district. Thirty thousand gallon water points including nine underground tanks and three ponds now exist every and one-half miles. The department's current insurance rating is 5/9. Translated, this means a class 9 rating for rural areas and a class 5 rating for areas on a hydrant system. The organization hopes to lower the rate to a class 5 or 7 for the entire district, thereby reducing insurance premiums for all. The NC Department of Insurance will relay their decision in the near future.

Chief Ward remembers when firemen had to purchase their own protective clothing and communications equipment. Now the department furnishes these necessities, along with insurance. Costs for the items amount to approximately \$1,400 per new volunteer, and consume almost 14% of the department's budget.

The thirty-five Mt. View volunteers provide numerous community services. They work closely with schools and conduct fire prevention programs for local students twice a year. Safety precautions are also demonstrated on Fire Prevention Day. Firemen direct traffic, put chains on schoolbuses when snow occurs, and hold fire prevention programs at churches.

The Mt. View Fire Department contracted with the City of Hickory in October of 1987. Annexation was voluntary and beneficial for the Mt. View Department. The rural tax base remains the same for the department, but Hickory now responds with a truck when structural fires occur in the district. Mt. View firemen also contracted with the Town of Brookford approximately five years ago, since the town had no fire department. The town pays the Mt. View fire tax rate in exchange for fire protection.

Mt. View volunteers have taken innovative steps. They devised an "Instant Command System." When a fire occurs, the chief assumes the command post. Volunteers report to the chief when they arrive on the scene and are assigned a duty. With this system, the chief explains, "you know where everyone is and what job they are doing." The department also appreciates the services of its chaplain, a local Baptist minister who helps the chief at the command post. The chaplain also works with fire victims who lose their homes. When firemen return from a fire, they immediately hold a training session to critique their performance. The innovative programs focuses on safety and utilization of manpower.

The Mt. View Volunteer Fire Department stresses safety and training in firefighting. Chief Ward believes the greatest changes in firefighting have come in areas of breathing equipment and turnout gear. Both have been significantly improved within the department for the increased safety of the Mt. View firemen. The Chief states that the greatest strength of his department is the extensive training of the thirty-five dedicated volunteers who train at least twice a month and welcome the chance to serve their community.

HISTORY OF THE NEWTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Newton Fire Company was organized by Newton citizens in 1886, but the Newton Fire Department was probably not officially organized until the city water system was completed in approximately 1907. However department activities prior to that time were recounted by two brothers who joined the department in 1908 and 1910 - Macon (Make) and Ray Cline. They described the firefighting methods of early days:

"The only equipment we had to fight fires was an old hook and ladder with rows of rubber buckets on either side. It was pulled by hand, Ever see one of them? Well there was a long tongue on the front and an even longer rope. Three or four men would take hold of the tongue and as many as could would grab ahold of the rope. You know, it took a pretty good crowd to pull that thing. For about the first 100 yards you could really make time but then the going slowed down."

When firefighters and their equipment arrived on the scene, a bucket brigade formed from the wall to the fire. The brothers said the primary fire alarm was the courthouse bell. "Somebody would get hold of the bell rope and would ring it like the dickens," said Make. Old whistles were also used as alarms. "Each of the mills would give short toots on their whistles to call firemen to the fire," the brothers added. When available, the firemen hitched F.E. Yount's dray horse or a moad-T to the fire equipment."¹

After city water works were completed, the hook and ladder bucket brigades were replaced with a two-wheeled reel cart. Hose was attached to the reel, and the contraption was manually pulled to the fire scene. The city purchased two carts. One is housed in the Newton Fire Department. Since firemen were not paid during this period, they were exempt from poll and street taxes which totaled about \$4 per year.

In 1920, the city acquired its first motorized truck - 1919 American LaFrance pumper now housed at the Catawba County Historical Museum. Make Cline, probably the department's first fire chief, was hired shortly after the purchase of the new truck. His firefighting force consisted of Tut Burgess and Lewis Yoder who died in 1936. Former Chief Burgess joined the department as a volunteer in 1923. He became a salaried fireman in 1926. He remembered the long hours of work with so few men. Times were particularly tough when one of the firemen became sick. Mr. Burgess began his career as a firefighter in a fire station located on 2nd Street in Newton."²

The department obtained its second truck, a new 750 gpm American LaFrance pumper, in 1937. With two trucks, the firemen provided county fire coverage in addition to the county protection offered by Hickory. In approximately 1947, the organization added a Ford pumper to its list of vehicles. The truck was sold in the early 1970s.

¹"Cline Brothers Retire as Volunteer Firemen After Serving for 98 Years," Observer-News-Enterprise, Vol. LXXVII, August 1, 1958.

²"He Fought Fires for 50 Years," Observer-News-Enterprise, March 12, 1973.

History of Newton Fire Department

Finding new employment, Chief Cline resigned in 1955 after forty-seven years of service. In 1958, Make and Ray Cline were the first firemen in Newton to retire under the NC Firemen's Pension Plan. Volunteer firemen Perry Reitzel became chief in 1955 and served for six years. When he retired, Tut Burgess was named chief and remained in the position for eleven years. During his tenure, the department acquired three trucks: a 1963 1,000 gpm pumper, a 1965 85 foot aerial ladder truck, and a 1967 250 gpm pumper. Chief Burgess praised the generosity of the City Council and Mayor Abernathy who made possible the purchase of these vehicles.³

Bill Russell was appointed chief when Tut Burgess retired in 1973. He has held the position for fifteen years. Chief Russell frequented the station as a child, became a volunteer in 1959, and began work as a full-time fireman in 1961. Since his appointment, the department has purchased a 1979 brush truck, a 1976 1,000 gallon tanker, a 1982 1,000 gpm Grumman pumper, and a 1983 chief's car. Firemen are currently anticipating the arrival of a 1988 1,250 gpm pumper.

In the 1950s, Newton demanded that the County extend to them the same financial assistance bestowed upon Hickory. Hickory purchased a fire truck for rural calls and the County agreed to pay for the truck on an installment plan. The truck would become County property when the final payment was made. In addition to the annual \$2,000 installment, Hickory received \$75 per rural fire call answered. In a September, 1952, meeting with County Commissioners, Alderman Frank Clapp who spoke for all Newton aldermen and firefighters requested that Newton be compensated with an amount greater than the normal \$75 per call fee. The County resolved the issue in early 1953. It purchased one of Newton's trucks on the installment plan and designated the truck for use in rural areas. The County continued to pay the department \$75 per rural call answered.

As other municipalities developed their own fire departments, the territory serviced by the Newton department became smaller. In 1955, County Planning Engineer Charles Davis outlined the rural districts covered by Newton and other municipalities so duplication of services and payments by the County could be avoided. By 1965, six additional rural fire departments had formed in the County. Many demands for service previously placed upon the department were then alleviated. Newton assisted in the training and organization of many rural departments and municipalities in the County.

Chief Russell states that one of the greatest changes in firefighting over the years is in the area of training. For approximately twenty-five years, his department has hosted the annual fall training school. Hundreds of firemen from across the County attend the event which the NC Department of Insurance instructs.

The Newton Fire Department is one of the leaders in fire prevention. Faye

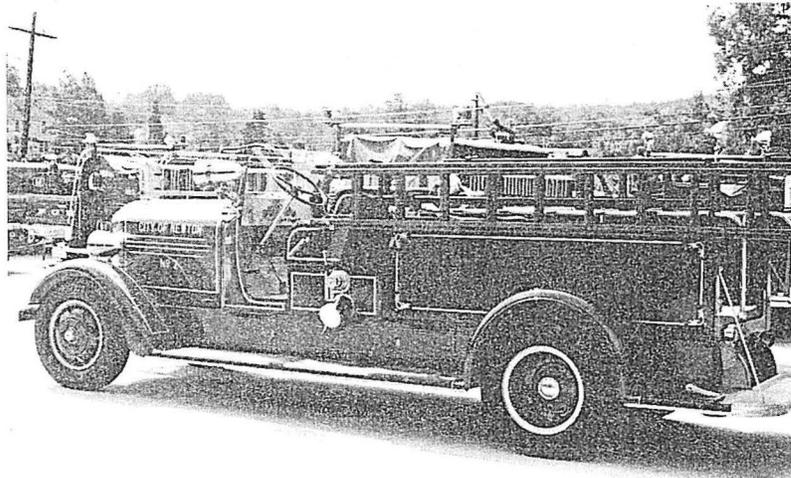
³ Ibid.

History of Newton Fire Department

Mull, hired as the organization's first female fire prevention officer in 1974, gave new meaning to the term "fire safety." She along with sidekick Sparky - a dalmatian acquired in 1974 - educated the public about fire hazards and fire safety until she left the department several years ago. In the mid 1970s, the department created a House of Hazards which alerted the public to fire dangers within the home in observance of Fire Prevention Week in October. In 1979, the First Annual Fire Prevention Parade was held in downtown Newton in observance of the same. During the yearly event, the Newton Department holds an open house at their station. Displays from all departments in the County are shown during the open house. Newton the Talking Fire truck, the department's 1937 American LaFrance pumper, is a highlight of the parade. In addition, the Newton Department teaches fire safety and prevention in local schools, clubs, and businesses.

The Newtawba Fire District is serviced by the Newton Department, and was created in approximately 1968. The district includes the area outside of Newton city limits. Prior to 1974, the rural area was serviced primarily with municipal funding. The County contributed \$75 for each rural call answered. In 1974, a flat monthly rate of \$200 was paid to the department for answering mutual aid calls. The County also set a fire tax rate of \$.03 per \$100 valuation for rural residents in Newtawba. The area within the city limits retains a Class 5 rating. The department receives approximately 25% of its operating costs from a County fire tax levy of \$.038 per \$100 valuation on the Newtawba area. The rest of the operating budget is provided by the City of Newton.

The number of salaried positions has grown over the years. Eight full-time employees are now serving the department. They include one chief, one captain in charge of inspection and station activities, and six driver-operators. Even though the department retains full-time manpower, Chief Russell states that the department's greatest strength is the time and effort given by its 28 volunteers.





Ray Sherrill, driver and Marion McGinnis, printer
head out on Newton's fire truck #1

HISTORY OF THE OXFORD VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

A small group of concerned citizens gathered at the request of Glenn P. Brown, Dorothy Brown and Roger Isaac in 1966 to discuss fire protection for the Oxford area. Through their efforts, community involvement kept growing. In May of 1966, approximately 100 Oxford Community residents were present at the Oxford Elementary School to discuss decreased insurance rates which would result from greater fire protection. The group was guided in their formation of the Oxford Fire Protection Association by Sherman Pickard, a representative of the NC Department of Insurance. Glenn P. Brown was elected president of this association. After subsequent meetings, the Oxford Volunteer Fire Department was chartered on February 28, 1967, to service the Oxford area formerly covered by the Claremont, Conover, and St. Stephens organizations.

Land and materials for the station were donated. Kenneth F. and Allen E. Hollar provided a 30' x 250' tract of land on which the fire station was erected. The station, constructed entirely by labor from the community, was completed in the fall of 1967. James L. Sigmon, department veteran and assistant chief for 17 years, recounts the volunteer efforts of the community. "We'd just go out and ask people to volunteer their labor to help with things and a lot of people came out to help us. Brick was brought from donations; some brick was donated, but all labor was donated. Bill Brown did the plumbing."

Mr. Sigmon recalls the way firemen were recruited - they were simply asked if they were interested. Thirty-one men volunteered, a number equivalent to today's roster. Glenn L. Boston served as the department's chief for approximately two years.

Meanwhile, a committee chaired by Marion Kanipe wrote the specifications for the new pumper truck, an order filled by Howe Apparatus Company. The Ford chassis and related equipment was purchased for \$22,000. The pumper arrived complete with six sets of turnout gear in August, 1968. The department was now ready to service the community. Catawba County Government provided a radio base station as well as radios for trucks still in use today. The firemen of the department recall the old bread box communications which notified the men of fires. Eight of these devices were possessed by the firemen. Tones were emitted from these boxes when fires occurred. It was then up to the wives of the men who possessed these devices to notify the other men of the situation. The department siren is still used, but has become basically obsolete with the use of modern Motorola pagers.

The next acquisition of the newly formed department was an old brush truck which the department converted into a 250 gallon Jeep brush buggy. Jerry Sherrill, the department's current chief and a 14 year veteran, relates his first experience in the rudimentary piece of machinery as a new fireman. "One Sunday we left church going to a woods fire. If you started going too fast, the front end would shimmy on it. I thought we were going into the ditch and said 'look out!' It scared the heck out of me. I said 'Oh, my gosh!' What have I gotten into?"

The department then bought an old 1956 tanker from a gas company and equipped it as a 2,000 gallon tanker. The tanker remained in operation for nineteen years. It was taken off the road several months ago. It was considered unsafe

History of Oxford Volunteer Fire Department

for the younger men to drive due to overloading.

The department has held fund raising events since its inception. Shooting matches held at the community center during the early years provided enough money for the department to purchase a ten acre tract of land on Highway 16 in 1971. With the income from these matches and fish fries, another tradition dating back to the early years of the department, firemen were able to purchase equipment needed for the basic operation of the department before fire district taxation was approved by the residents of the Oxford community on March 31, 1973.

With these newly acquired funds, the status of fundraising changed for a time. Chief Sherrill states that residents and firemen could no longer see why they should donate money and expend additional efforts. The result was a shortage of manpower which caused the cancellation of shooting matches. However, approximately six years ago, James Sigmon revived the traditional fish fries. The fireman claim to serve the best fish in the state during these bianannual events. Tremendous community support has enabled the department to double the amount of dinners now prepared. The firemen have also raised funds from a Power Boat Drag on Lake Lookout held annually for the past four years. A profit of \$4,500 was realized from this event during one of those years. The firemen publicized the races and fish fries by placing signs throughout the community. The profits from these fundraisers have been used to convert a brush truck and purchase breathing equipment, among other uses.

In the late 1970s, the land purchased on Highway 16 was sold. Proceeds from this sale were used to purchase a 7.5 acre tract of land on the Oxford School Road. A new and modern fire station was build there. A federal loan supplemented funds raised by the firemen. The construction contract was awarded to Roger W. Isaac Building Contractors in June, 1980. Firemen completed much of the site and yard work. Community volunteers donated time and equipment. The new station was completed in November of 1980; an Open House was held in December.

In approximately 1984, the department said goodby to its second chief, Kenneth Hollar, who had guided the department for fifteen years. He was replaced by Chief Chris Brown.

Active in community involvement, the firemen host the 4-H Safety and Prevention Program held for students of the Oxford Elementary School. Firemen also participate in parades across the County.

Firemen are quick to remember the contributions made by the Ladies Auxiliary and wives whom they admit are the backbone of the organization. The Ladies Auxiliary holds several fundraisers each year, and are currently working on a cookbook aside from selling flavoring. These women not only provide refreshments at meetings and fires, but also donate \$100 worth of sheets to fire victims. Each Christmas they remember the firemen by giving gifts to them. When fires occur, the wives, who are also members of the Auxiliary, worry throughout the night about their husbands, and wash the dirty uniforms of

History of Oxford Volunteer Fire Department

the firefighters when they return home.

The members of the Oxford Volunteer Fire Department fight approximately 25 fires per year and maintain a fire insurance rating of 9. The greatest changes in firefighting over the years mentioned by both veteran Sigmon and Chief Sherrill are the required use of breathing equipment, the lengthened hours of required training, and the increased number of firefighting schools offered to the firemen.

Since moving to their new home, the volunteers purchased a new 1983 1,000 gallon GMC pumper tanker, and directed their efforts toward raising more money to buy additional equipment. Chief Sherrill attributes the low fire tax rate in his community to the numerous fundraising activities held by the department. But he also notes that community participation is greater when the firemen make an effort to involve the community. If you leave the community out, they are more likely to resent you. Chief Sherrill should know. His firemen have involved their community with excellent results.

HISTORY OF PROPST CROSSROADS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

As early as 1953, County Commissioners called for the organization of a rural fire department in the Propst area, an area which had virtually no fire protection due to its distant location from any organized fire department. Again in 1956, Charles Davis, the creator of rural fire district zones, made clear the pressing need for two completely rural firefighting organizations - one to be located in the Propst Crossroads area. Plans for levying a special tax to support such a unit were discussed with Davis who stressed that Hickory practically refused to travel as far south as the Propst area. Chiefs of other municipalities could refuse to answer fire calls if response time would make their services futile, although Newton did try to provide coverage to the area prior to its organization.

Residents in the Propst community were best described as outraged. They were helping to fund rural fire service through contracts with municipalities, but at the same time were basically assured of no fire protection for themselves.

Finally, in the fall of 1961, a group of citizens from the Propst, Mt. View, and Bancak areas held a meeting in the Mt. View community and discussed the possibility of organizing a volunteer department to cover both areas. After several meetings, the group decided each community should form its own department because a tremendous amount of territory needed fire service.

Individuals from the Propst community were selected to continue plans for the establishment of a volunteer fire department in the Propst area. A charter was secured after meeting with Mr. Merritt, County Attorney. A Board of Directors was selected and they, in turn, appointed a Building, Equipment, and Finance Committee. J.D. Jarrett donated land for "civic and fire department use." The finance committee canvassed the community for cash and pledges, and obtained approximately \$7000.00. The majority of building construction was done on a volunteer basis by people of the community. The result was a three bay building with adjoining assembly room. Members of the Fairbrook, Hickory, and St. Stephens Volunteer Fire Departments assisted the organization of the Propst unit. Meanwhile, the equipment committee wrote the specifications for a new truck, a 1962 Ford F-800. The Ward LaFrance pumper arrived in October of 1962, and the department immediately began operation under the leadership of Chief F.E. Hoke.

Because of the massive amount of territory contained in the district, citizens of the Cooksville area formed their own volunteer fire department in 1967. The new organization provided some relief for Propst firemen.

A weapons carrier was purchased by the Propst Department and rebuilt to fight brush fires. The firemen then bought a 1947 tanker from the Viewmont Department, and a 10,000 gallon water tank was acquired. In 1971, the building was given a facelift with a new roof and interior paint. Two brick bays were added to the station in 1972-73.

The Propst Volunteer Fire Department, located in the Fred T. Foard Fire District, obtained a 9A fire insurance classification in January of 1971. According to Chief Billie Leonhardt, Propst fights approximately 50 fires per year. Leonhardt has been a volunteer firefighter for twenty-three years, and became only the second chief in the department's long history several years ago.

History of the Propst Crossroads Volunteer Fire Department

The volunteers, currently 44 strong, meet each Tuesday night. At this time they check radio equipment and participate in training sessions.

Prior to the fire tax, fundraisers were the only means of acquiring the badly needed equipment. The Ladies Auxiliary, formed when the department was organized, has always assisted firemen in fund raising projects. Chief Leonhardt recalls making ice-cream on Sunday afternoons and selling it at the Crossroads. He praises the people of the community for their support of fundraisers such as chicken pie suppers and barbecues, and says that fundraisers remain an important function of the department. "When we want an extra piece of equipment, we still hold special events," states the Chief. Last October, a haunted house and barbecue supper were held. Another supper is planned to raise funds to renovate the fire department's kitchen.

Chief Leonhardt believes the greatest strength of his department is its volunteers. "The guys like to serve. We think it's the greatest thing in the world when we help someone; it just gives everyone a good feeling."



HISTORY OF ST. STEPHENS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Plans were made to organize the county's second rural fire fighting department, St. Stephens, after Hickory announced that it could no longer provide rural fire coverage after June 30, 1957, because of insurance rating difficulties. On March 14, 1957, the St. Stephens Lions Club initiated organization when they called Hickory Fire Chief, Earl G. Moser, to address their meeting. A Board of Directors was elected this night. As the men discussed plans, a fire was discovered at the Turner General Store. Many of the department's original firemen helped the Hickory firemen fight the blaze. One of these men, Wayne Bloch, recalls the equipment used to fight the fire: "I was on the hose that night. We had what you called an old Buck Rogers nozzle on the hose. There was a three stage pump they (Hickory) had on the truck, and it had to operate under extremely high pressure." The store was not saved.

Plans for the new department continued. A public meeting was held in April to discuss organization. Groundwork was laid in May, 1957, when a committee was appointed to select a location for the fire station, secure needed equipment, organize departmental personnel, and plan for solicitations. Citizens held a meeting at the Hickory National Guard Armory and provisional officers were elected for a six month term. Fred Shell became Chief. At that same meeting, the group contracted with Chief Shell to build and lease a fire station behind Shell's Barbecue. Fund raising plans were announced in June, and bids for equipment were received in July. Personnel recruitment began in October, and a training program for the new volunteers was directed by Harry Yount and Jim Tate of the Hickory Fire Department.

The station was completed, and firemen anxiously awaited the December arrival of their new fire engine - a 1957 American LaFrance pumper with Chevrolet chassis. Charter member, Wayne Bloch, remembers the delivery of the truck: "At that time, all fire trucks were delivered by rail. On Saturday after delivery, we took the truck up to the freight depot and loaded all the hose that we got with the truck in boxes on the truck. We looked like a bunch of gypsies coming back down the road sitting all over the truck and the hose. We were proud of that, Harry Yount and Jim Tate came down and showed us how to load the hose on the truck."

With their new fire truck, the department officially began answering fire calls on January 1, 1958, without any protective clothing. Longtimer Jerry Kale remembers his first fire fighting suit was an old field jacket and toboggan. Later the men acquired raincoats which, they said, were hotter than the fire itself.

The department's second piece of equipment was a 1952 Dodge truck. Firemen converted the truck into a 1300 gallon tanker. Fund raising drives such as chicken dinners, barbecue suppers, and light bulb sales financed the pumper, tanker, and operating expenses. Firemen were assisted in fund raising by the Ladies Auxiliary which was formed on April 9, 1958. The department is particularly proud of the Auxiliary. The women worked extremely hard to provide additional operating funds and equipment for the firemen. They also created a clothes closet for fire victims. Boy Scouts and local churches assisted the department with legwork during the solicitations.

History of St. Stephens Volunteer Fire Department

Early years of the department's existence were financially strained. When the organization was unable to pay bills, local businesses, particularly Hickory Fry Furniture and Shook Builders, provided the department with money. Current Chief Killian states that if needed, the businesses would provide the same today.

In March of 1958, a contract which gave the firemen a needed financial boost was signed with the county. The department would meet the fire needs in rural areas outside a one-half mile radius of the fire station in return for a fee of \$75 per call. Over an eight month period in 1959/1960, St. Stephens received almost \$2500 from this plan. When the county discussed changing the plan and instituting a county-wide tax in 1960, St. Stephens stated they were satisfied with the present arrangement.

A 1959 request for insurance classification brought reduced fire insurance rates to residents within a four mile radius of the department. Savings were as much as \$.24 per \$100 valuation. At this time, the department retained equipment valued at twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars. The department served approximately 2300 homes and 115 businesses. In order to receive the new insurance rating, a fire siren was placed atop the station's hose drying rack, a red beacon light was purchased for the fire truck, and a set of chains was acquired for the tanker. The Ladies Auxiliary bought many of these items for the fire fighters.

As the department acquired new trucks over the coming years, the need for a new station became apparent. A new 1960 1500 gallon International tanker was purchased and fully equipped for a cost of \$7,500. The leased building could no longer house all of the equipment. A site for the new location was sought as early as 1964. Then, according to departmental minutes, one of the fire trucks fell into a cesspool in 1965. Damages were reported to the insurance company. The next year, a new truck and 1500 gallon tank acquired. The two older trucks were left outside during the winter and drained of water so they would not freeze. The situation increased the response time of fire calls, since tanks had to be filled before calls could be answered.

The Old Herman homeplace, located on Springs Road, was purchased as the site for the new fire station in 1965. The home was rented until enough donations could be raised to begin construction, then burned. Estimated cost of the new station was \$30,000. A fund raising drive begun in February of 1967, brought in \$16,000 in one year. Charter member Wayne Bolch states: "We were told we'd never build it and pay for it - it cost too much. We built it and moved into it, debt free. I think we did it on a challenge." The firemen, themselves, completed much of the work. Materials such as concrete and brick were donated by the community at one-half of the cost. The men held an Open House to show off their new station on June 2, 1968.

Members were approached by the Conover Rural Fire Fund Committee in August, 1970, and asked to establish a second station to cover the fringe areas of Conover. After several meetings, the St. Stephens department decided that they would give assistance in organizing and training, but did not wish to assume the financial responsibilities of another new station.

History of St. Stephens Volunteer Fire Department

When the issue of a countywide fire tax was widely discussed among county departments in April, 1971, St. Stephens declared their area would not pay someone else's fire fighting costs. The department wanted to control their own destiny, so they immediately began proceedings to call a district-wide fire tax election. Although they had resisted this course for years, the organization believed the action was necessary, since only 10% of the district was financially supporting the fire department. Firemen were assisted in their efforts by Fire Marshal David A. Yount, who relayed to them the rules and regulations for calling a district-wide vote. A petition was circulated, and the necessary signatures were obtained. An election was held on March 31, 1973. Veteran Bolch recalls, "The best I can remember, there were only four or five votes against and the rest for. We made a promise to the people that we'd get the tax down as low as we could." The firemen kept their promise. A tax of \$.06 per \$100 valuation was reduced to \$.04, and then lowered to the present \$.012 after needed equipment was obtained. The low figure is matched only by the Class 6 fire insurance rating the district maintains.

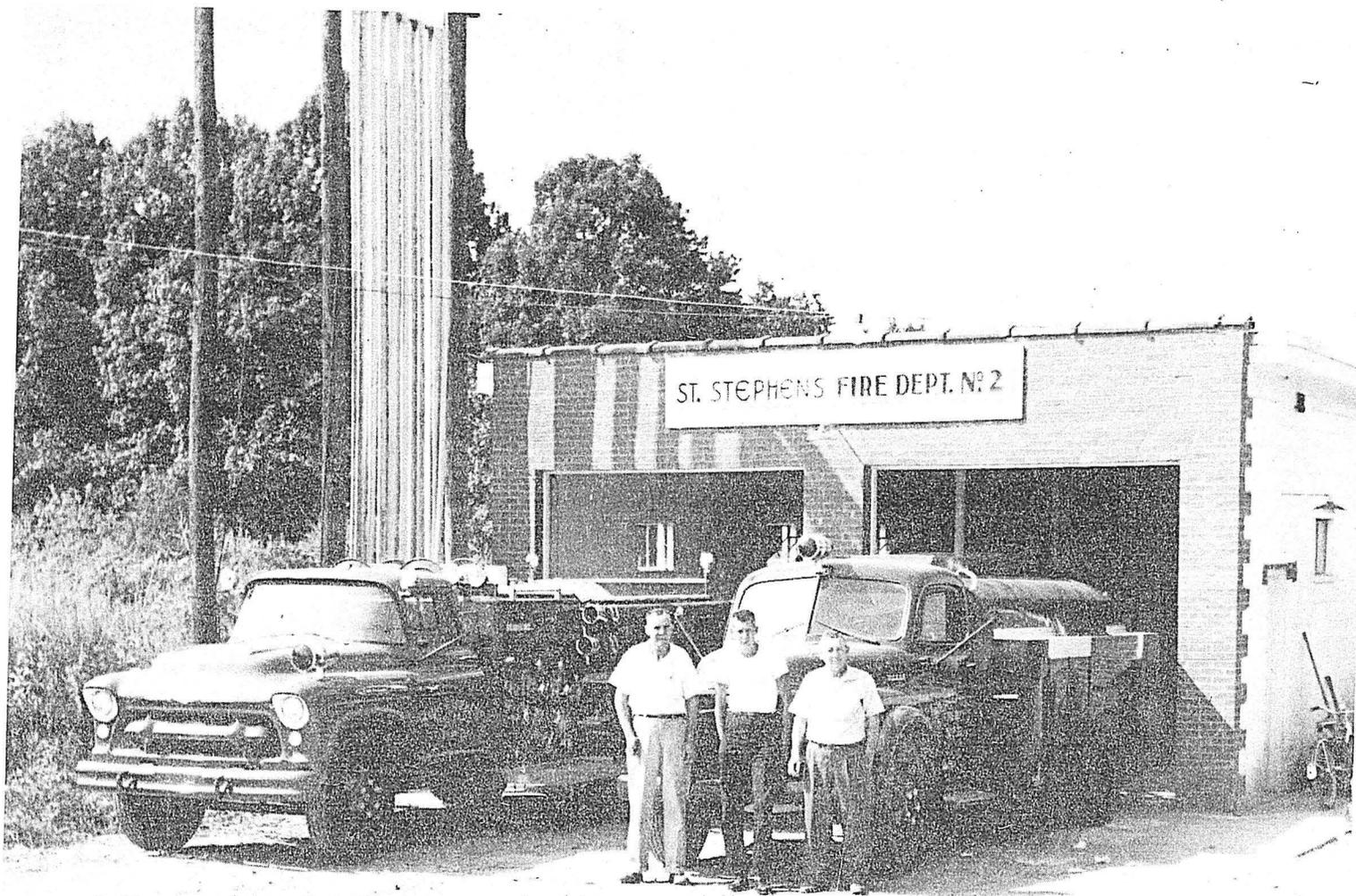
Much of the department's success can be attributed to its leadership. After nineteen years of service as chief, Fred Shell was replaced by the legendary but modest Wade Hefner. Chief Hefner guided the department until his resignation in 1986. Howard Killian assumed the post in 1986, and is presently serving as chief. Under his guidance, the department is planning for the future.

Recently acquired fire fighting equipment was designed and purchased to serve the needs of the rapidly expanding community. Over the years, the St. Stephens community has experienced tremendous growth in residential dwellings and commercial buildings. The fire fighting needs of the community are currently met with a 1976 Chevrolet 1000 gpm mainline pumper, a 1979 one ton 400 gpm Chevrolet four-wheel drive mini-pumper/brush truck, a 1976 1000 gpm pumper tanker with 1200 gallon tanker refurbished in 1986, and a 1982 Chevrolet 1000 gpm pumper-tanker with 1000 gallon tank. Because equipment is tailored to the type of fires occurring in the community, and since water lines cover 80% of the territory, mutual aid is rarely requested.

The St. Stephen's firemen have assured a bright future for themselves. The department entered into a contract with the City of Hickory in 1986. The department provides fire protection for annexed areas formerly serviced by St. Stephens, while the incoming revenue of the department remains the same. As far as the department is concerned, nothing has really changed. Firemen also recently devised a five year budget plan to deal with equipment and station modifications which will result from increased expansion and growth in their district.

Chief Killian believes the greatest strength of his department is its experienced membership. Seventy-five percent of the fire fighters have remained with the department for over fifteen years and contributed to its success. The twenty-eight volunteers boast of an excellent record. A 25% reduction in fires over the past four years speaks for the fire prevention effectiveness of the team. Property loss has also declined dramatically over the years.





HISTORY OF THE SHERRILLS FORD-TERRELL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Interested citizens met at the Sherrills Ford School in August, 1969, to discuss organizing a volunteer fire department of the area. Frank Cherry was elected President of the group. The Sherrills Ford-Terrell Volunteer Fire Department was incorporated, and the charter was received from the State of North Carolina in September. In May of the following year, the group met with two representatives from the Bandys Volunteer Fire Department who offered to give the department a retired water wagon for the price of \$1.00. The gift was graciously accepted and became the unit's first piece of firefighting equipment.

Funds were solicited throughout the year. When the group had collected almost \$1,600, a building committee was selected and instructed to proceed with plans. They determined that construction costs would not exceed \$20,000. The water wagon was repaired and repainted, and the County furnished the department with a base station radio and monitors.

Carroll Lineberger was elected president in July, 1970, and a board of directors who have guided the organization over the years was appointed at the same meeting. By September, the department voted to purchase a 1952 GMC fire truck from the Troutman Fire Department at a cost of \$4,000. The truck was delivered in March, 1971.

Much of the labor and many of the materials for the new station were donated by the future firemen and people of the community. Groundbreaking for the new station occurred on October 16, 1971. The firemen and ladies Auxiliary worked long hours to raise money for departmental and building expenses. Fundraisers such as baseball concessions, talent shows, bake sales, numerous raffles and suppers were held. Community support was phenomenal. The volunteers were able to raise almost \$18,000 by mid-1972. The building was completed in early 1972, and Open House was held on May 21, 1972. The department, led by Chief Larry Kopley, began servicing the community on the same day.

Firemen anxiously awaited approval of their new district by the County Commissioners because they wanted to circulate a petition to levy fire tax for much needed operational expenses. In October, 1972, the firemen participated in a discussion of a county-wide levy for fire tax. The department agreed to support such a proposal provided the distribution was just and equitable. After a county-wide hearing in late November, the department decided, instead, to work for a district tax. During January, 1973, the department was notified that they must submit a circulated petition for the purpose of levying a district fire tax before the end of the month. The verdict of the petition and subsequent fire tax election held on March 31, 1973, was one of approval by 70% of the citizens of the area.

With the passage of the new fire tax, the volunteer department could look to the future. They were able to finance a new tanker at a low rate of interest in 1973. Plans were made for an addition to the department, just as the first check from the fire district taxes arrived. Weddie Gabriel was elected the new president, and Tommy Stutts replaced Larry Kopley as chief during this year.

The Board of Directors met in September, 1974, to discuss the financing of a new pumper truck and additions to the firehouse. The present pumper was then

History of Sherrills Ford-Terrell Volunteer Fire Department

22 years old and would be used as a backup. A bid of \$39,340 by Howe Fire Apparatus was accepted. The addition to the station was completed in February, 1975, and at that time the station was probably the largest in the County. The firehouse, complete with kitchen, was made available to various groups within the community.

The County Commissioners approved a fire tax rate of \$.029 per \$100 valuation for the community shortly after the 1975 election of president Carroll Linebarger and Chief Maison Sherrill. Breathing equipment was purchased at the request of the new president for the safety of the firemen.

In 1976 plans were made to acquire a fire insurance rating for the district. This was achieved in 1977. Earl Knox was elected president for the coming year, and the new pumper arrived. The department also purchased a 1964 bread truck and converted it into a utility truck. The Ladies Auxiliary contributed the funds necessary for the purchase.

Planning for the future, the board and firemen realized that by the time the two pieces of new equipment were paid for, they would be ten years old. The remaining pieces of equipment would be more than twenty years old. Therefore the department proposed a fire tax of \$.06 per \$100 valuation for the 1978/79 fiscal year to begin building a fund for replacement of the old pumper and tanker. Meanwhile, they were equipping a recently acquired four-wheel drive brush buggy.

In 1979, Ralph Drum was elected president, and Willie Bass, chief. The following year the department decided to order a new tanker from Howe Apparatus. The chassis was purchased from Safety Chevrolet Company of Mooresville. Total price for the tanker and chassis was approximately \$41,500. The Ladies Auxiliary donated \$1,500 toward the purchase price.

Henry Gabriel, who served for many years as vice-president of the organization, became president in 1980. Yet a history of this department would not be complete without mentioning the tremendous efforts of former secretary Neil Gabriel, and former treasurers James Fleming and Robert Weaver.

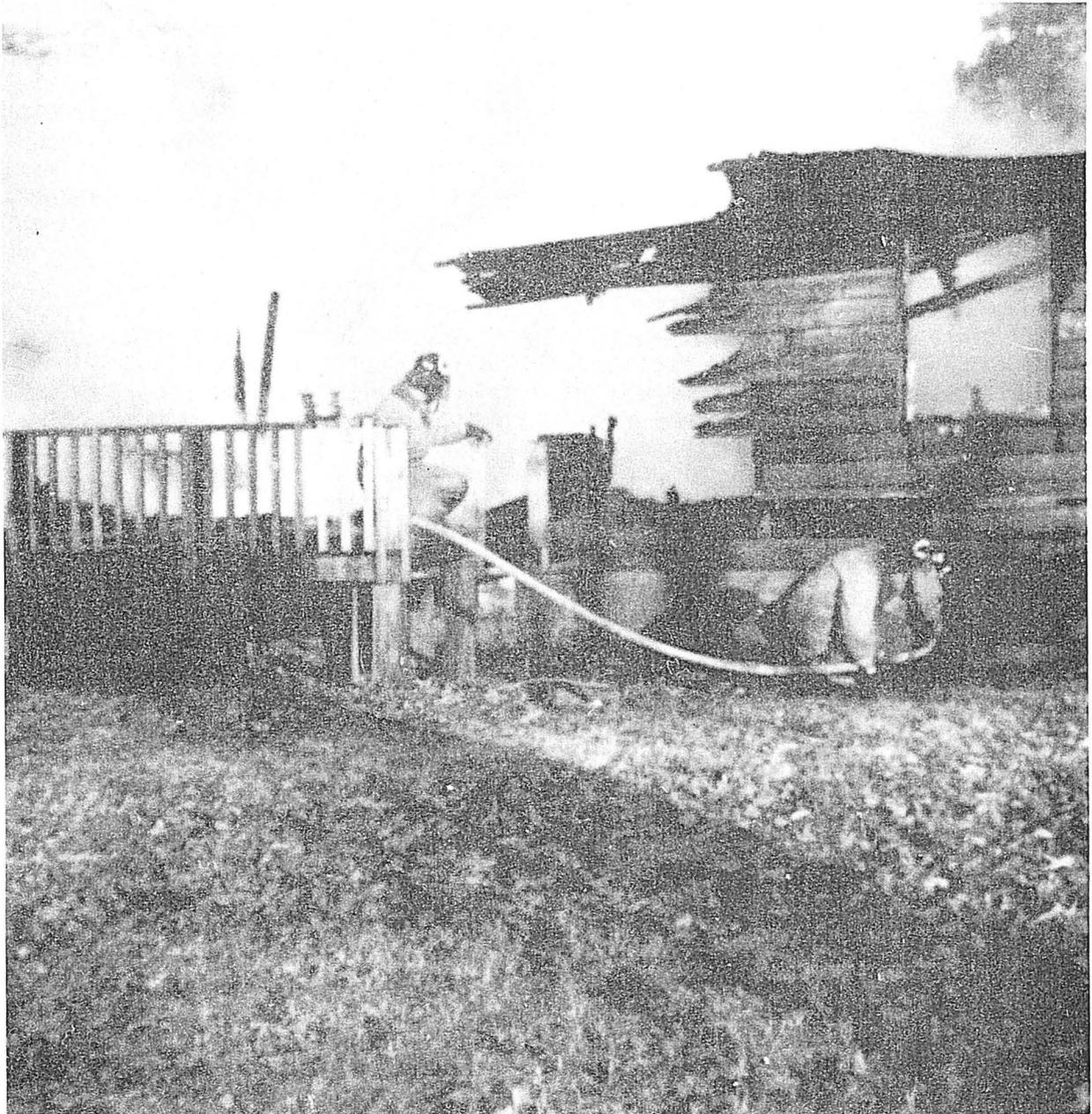
Willie Bass has served as chief since 1979. He has been a firefighter for 16 years. During his tenure, the department obtained a new 1,500 gpm pumper on a Mack chassis. Chief Bass is proud of his 28 volunteers who fight approximately 50 fires per year. Chief Bass states, "We're #1." He believes the greatest strengths of his department are its young men and new equipment.

The Chief reminisces about the phenomenal changes in firefighting costs and equipment. "The first pumper we had cost \$2,000; the last truck we bought was \$130,000. The price of firefighting equipment is going up about 10% per year." But he states that the greatest change is the increased safety required for firefighters. "The whole system is safety first, in uniforms and equipment."

The department has come a long way since 1969. They are moving into the 21st century with a recently purchased computer. All men have been outfitted in new

- History of Sharrills Ford-Terrell Volunteer Fire Department

OSHA approved uniforms and the firemen are presently working to lower the insurance rating in their district.



HISTORY OF THE STARTOWN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Progressive, innovative, and unafraid to try new approaches with an eye to the future - that is the way Startown firefighters see themselves. The group is the youngster on the block, amidst a myriad of older departments with distinguished histories. But the Startown department has made a history of its own which is well documented in scrapbooks compiled by firefighter Ernest Huffman. During the organization's eight years of existence, the once fledgling department has taken great strides.

The first meeting called for the purpose of organizing a fire department was held on July 9, 1979, although residents within the district had made attempts to establish a department for five years. At this time, a steering committee of twelve members formed to investigate the need for a fire department in Startown. The meeting was conducted by Tony White and former Fire Marshal, Kent Brown. According to current chief Cade Huffman, "He's (Tony White) the reason we're here. He was the head door-knocker, the driving force that kept us going. Kent Brown was the leg man when we got cranked up. He trained and taught our first firemen. He spent a lot of nights out here."

Meetings continued and culminated in a request to the Catawba County Commissioners for a new fire district. The proposed district, molded from portions of the old Newton and Maiden rural districts, contained approximately 2,500 people. The tax rate of the area was \$.04 per \$100 valuation. Projections of revenue for the new department amounted to \$7,500 from fire tax monies. The Commissioners approved the boundaries for the Startown district on March 10, 1980.

The twenty-six volunteers trained rigorously for their new duties in order to meet state requirements for firefighting. They were led by professional firemen from the Newton and Hickory departments, and received guidance from Kent Brown. On July 1, 1980, they began servicing the community under the leadership of Tony White, the department's first chief.

Immediately after they decided to organize, the firemen sought and obtained a loan to construct a firehouse and needed firefighting equipment. A 1957 Chevrolet 500 gpm pumper owned by St. Stephens Volunteer Fire Department was purchased for a meager \$6,000. A 1969 Ford 1,000 gallon tanker was acquired from the Danielstown Fire Department for the same amount. A 1947 brush unit donated by the Maiden Volunteer Fire Department arrived in early 1981. Equipment was stored in the old Self Lumber Building on Highway 10 before completion of the new firehouse.

The newly formed department with their Board of Directors chose to construct their new station 1/2 mile south of Startown Crossroads. The building was begun with \$3,000 collected from fundraising events. After the land was purchased, the concrete slab and outer shell of the station were completed in August, 1980, by Ray Helms Construction Company. The firemen, along with the community, finished much of the remaining interior construction and wiring, thereby saving the Startown residents a large amount of money.

The firemen held an Open House on April 5, 1981, to acquaint area residents with the workings of their new department. At the event, the department's newly elected chief, Tony Moore, allayed the fears of a small group of

History of Startown Volunteer Fire Department

residents who opposed the department fearing it might cost them more in taxes. Moore explained to the residents that the Startown Department qualified, with the assistance of Kent Brown, for a Class 9 insurance rating. The rating would result in lowered insurance premiums for property owners, and therefore offset fire taxes.

As the Startown community continued to grow by leaps and bounds, the department realized the older equipment needed to be replaced in order to better service the community. Looking to the future, Chief Moore attended the 1981 budget hearings of the Catawba County Board of Commissioners and requested that the current \$.04 fire tax be increased to \$.065, instead of the recommended \$.05. Chief Moore stated that the department could obtain a lower insurance rating if more funds could be allocated to buy new equipment. The Chief was denied his request. The Commissioners stated that Startown's situation was no different than those faced by other fire stations throughout the County. The County did, however, relocate a 1959 Ford 750 gpm pumper, one of the original County-owned trucks, from the Newton Fire Department in 1982.

Unimpeded by the Commissioners' verdict, the department worked diligently to raise additional funds. The annual yard and bake sale held in conjunction with the Ladies Auxiliary began in 1981. Undaunted by a poor turnout the previous year, firemen held their 2nd Annual Haunted House in October, 1981. So great was the success of this project that last year alone, the 8th Annual Haunted House brought in over \$7,000 of revenue for the department.

In July, 1983, the Startown Fire Department acquired a new GMC truck, capable of pumping 1,000 gpm, for a cost of \$56,000. The new fire engine was equipped to meet standards for the next twenty years. A down payment of \$8,000 was made, however firemen sought additional funds to reduce payments. The Ladies Auxiliary sponsored a hamburger, hot dog, and bake sale in August, and donated the proceeds toward this effort. The names of donors contributing \$100 or more were placed on a plaque next to a picture of the new truck hanging in the chief's office. The new pumper replaced the 1957 model, and brought the vehicle count at Startown to four.

A memorable year for the organization was 1987. Led by Chief Cade Huffman, elected the year before and a member of the original group of Startown firefighters, the organization purchased a new brush truck, Unit #183, in June. Fundraising proceeds, particularly the Haunted House, paid for the entire cost of the truck. In the same month, Startown received a matching grant of \$470 from the Rural Community Fire Protection Program which dispersed money to volunteer fire departments. September marked the purchase of a new GMC Tanker which held 1,500 gallons of water. The tanker replaced the old 1969 Ford unit received in 1980, and was acquired at a cost of \$73,000. Chief Huffman stated that the purchase was made possible by the citizens and firefighters of the district.

Over the years, the Startown volunteers have done much more for the community than simply fight fires. They conduct CPR and 4-H Programs, give FIA

History of Startown Volunteer Fire Department

presentations and community watch assistance, and advise the community in fire safety precautions. The firemen believe firefighting is a community effort. The community certainly supports the firemen with fundraising efforts and tax dollars. The firemen, in turn, dedicate their time and energy to the community through firefighting and instruction.

Chief Huffman's greatest fear is that the department might lose its closeness and camaraderie as the community expands and the organization becomes larger. He considers the future:

"I hope we can maintain the type of togetherness that we've had the first eight years. I know the community will get larger and I hope we won't lose perspective of where we came from....I hope the community spirit will stay there with the new people coming in."

In an effort to maintain togetherness among members, the Startown firemen hold covered dish suppers, Thanksgiving suppers, and fall outings for their families, Easter Egg Hunts and Christmas parties for their children; and Christmas dinners and parties for the adults.

The Chief says tradition dies slowly with fire departments. Although the organization still uses the traditional red fire engines, they have broken with the past in many other respects. Startown is the only department in the County without a siren atop their station. Modern communications equipment made sirens obsolete. Furthermore, the department uses a type of hose and nozzle different from most other departments in the County. Chief Huffman relates that if new and better technology becomes available, his organization will try it. If it works for the department, then they will use it. Thus far, the men have been pleased with all of their innovations. They believe it is essential to look to the future in order to provide the best possible service to the community, thereby saving the greatest amount of lives and property possible.

The men praise the mutual aid program in the County, and say they could not operate without it. Many of the volunteers are unable to break away from regular paying jobs during the daytime, so the Startown organization counts on the aid received from Fairbrook Volunteer Fire Department during a structural fire. "We have a standing practice with Fairbrook," explains Chief Huffman. "We run a tanker automatically with each other's structure calls." Huffman also points to another advantage of the volunteer-mutual aid arrangement. Homeowners should rest easier knowing 15 to 20 men will arrive to protect their property. With this arrangement, a much larger turnout of manpower is inevitable.

In the fall of 1987, Startown firemen began construction of their "Carolina (Blue) Room." Recently completed, this room is located on the 2nd level of the fire station. Constructed entirely by the labor of firemen, the Carolina Room is used as a meeting and training room. Chief Huffman, proud of the contributions, dedication, and sacrifices of his firemen, states:

History of Startown Volunteer Fire Department

"They (the fireman) pay their taxes, and then they have to miss work to fight fires. Some are off the clock. You lose money, time off from work, gas, wear and tear on vehicles, and most men buy a few minor tools. It costs several hundred dollars per year to be a fireman. We are giving our time and money. It's rough."

The strides taken by this eight year old department are tremendous, and the future looks promising. With the help of a new twelve inch waterline coming to the community, the Startown Volunteer Fire Department hopes to lower insurance rates and provide even better community service.



HISTORY OF THE VIEWMONT VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The City of Hickory gave notice in 1956 that it would no longer service rural areas after its contract with the County expired on June 30, 1957. A group of approximately thirty residents and interested persons including the Catawba County Board of Commissioners and heads of other fire departments in the area met on March 13, 1957. They discussed the feasibility of forming a rural fire department to provide fire coverage for areas formerly serviced by the Hickory Fire Department. Enthusiasm ran high at this meeting, and many of the able-bodied men present volunteered to serve. Prior to the meeting, Tom DeRhodes inquired about the use of a County-owned truck stationed at Hickory. He was appointed chairman of a special committee to supervise the department's organization.

A second meeting was held at Viewmont School on March 27, 1957. Seventy-five residents from suburban areas adjacent to the City of Hickory voted to establish a non-profit corporation known as the Viewmont No. 1 Central Fire Station - the County's first completely rural volunteer department. A Board of Directors, the governing body of the new department, was named to supervise and control the organization. Each board member served a three year term. Tom DeRhodes was elected president of the board. The residents at this meeting concluded that they would organize even if the County-owned truck could not be obtained. Representatives of the new department requested and were given the 1952 Ford 500 gpm pumper after meeting with the Board of Commissioners in April.

Newspapers reported the new organization wanted to cooperate with the County and locate the fire station at a site where it could best serve the major area of suburban population and valuation in both the present and future. With this in mind, the organization secured a site in the Viewmont area on 23rd Avenue, Northeast. The property was owned by Paul Sigmon who built the station to meet the specifications of the department and leased it to the group.

Another meeting was called for those who wished to become volunteers. Forty men had already signed on, and training began immediately so service could begin in early June. Hickory fire coverage would expire in late June, and insurance rates would increase if the volunteer department did not act quickly. Fortunately, the community already had water lines and hydrants over most of the community.

The new organization solicited money from residents and businesses in the four mile radius of their territory. Funds were collected to construct the new station, buy a tanker, and furnish additional firefighting equipment. Members intended to provide fire coverage to areas both inside and outside the four mile radius.

The department began servicing the Viewmont, St. Stephens, Fairbrook, Brookford, Mountain View, Houcks Chapel and Alexander County areas with the 1952 County-owned pumper in July of 1957., until the communities established departments of their own. Twenty-two volunteers were led by the department's first chief, Donald W. Bennison until September of 1957, when George C. Brown was elected chief. Wayne K. Bowman acquired the position one year later. Meanwhile, the department acquired an old Diamond-T chassis and converted it into a 1,000 gallon tanker. In the mid 1960s, it was sold to the newly formed

History of the Viewmont Volunteer Fire Department

Propst Crossroads Fire Department.

During the early years, the department was financially strained at best. Surviving primarily on donations from the community, the organization received little benefit from its contract with the County. Under the terms of this contract, the County contributed \$75 to the department for each rural call answered outside a one-half mile radius of the fire station. Over an eight month period in 1960, Viewmont received only \$225 of revenue from the County. This was partially due to the establishment of two new volunteer departments in the area, St. Stephens and Fairbrook. The organization estimated that by August of the same year, all funds would be depleted. However, donations and solicitations carried the department through this critical time. Jimmy O'Daniel served as Chief during this period. He relocated and was replaced by Dwight H. Bowman in July of 1960. Tom C. DeRhodes took over the helm in July, 1961, and served as chief for eighteen years.

A petition was submitted to the County Commissioners for the purpose of levying a fire tax in August of 1964. The proposal was favorably received by Viewmont residents in a November 24 election. The Board decided to levy a tax of \$.05 per \$100 valuation for the coming year.

With the new source of funding, the department made needed additions to their equipment and fire station. A new 1965 GMC 1,200 gallon quick dump tanker was purchased to replace the old Diamond-T truck. A new Grumman Firecat 1,000 gpm pumper was acquired in 1980. The truck helped the department meet the standards necessary to lower the fire insurance rate of residents. The station was enlarged to house the new piece of equipment. An Open House was held in August to display the new additions. In March, 1985, a 750 gpm pumper and a 750 gpm pumper-tanker with 1,250 gallon tank and foam system were purchased from the Guilford College Fire Department. Although the station had been enlarged, it could house only four pieces of equipment. The 1952 County-owned truck was stored at the Hickory Fire Department and used as a reserve pumper. The truck is now a highlight during Fire Prevention Week and fire education programs.

In 1977, Terry DeRhodes, niece of Tom DeRhodes, joined the Viewmont Fire Department. She was the first female volunteer firefighter in the County. Current Chief Poovey stated, "She got the job done." Since then, Ms. DeRhodes has moved out of the area, but has remained active with firefighting and EMS.

The Viewmont Volunteer Fire Department has maintained a good working relationship with the City of Hickory. The organization entered into a contract with the City of Hickory in June, 1986. The contract establishes guidelines of departmental operation within the Viewmont/Hickory area as annexation occurs. Hickory reimburses the organization with revenues equivalent to the lost tax base. A full-time man from the Hickory Fire Department is stationed at the Viewmont Department twenty-four hours a day. He is the first to respond with a truck when a fire call is received. Hickory will build a new fire station for Viewmont under the terms of this contract. Construction will begin in the late summer on a site located between 30th and

History of the Viewmont Volunteer Fire Department

31st Avenues, Northeast, in the Viewmont area. The two departments also have a dual response agreement whereby both respond to structural fires. Because of the agreement, mutual aid has not been needed by the Viewmont Department since 1983.

Current Chief Poovey has been a volunteer for fifteen years. He has served as chief for nine of those years. During his tenure of service, he has seen many changes in firefighting equipment. Foremost among these are the use of larger handlines and protective breathing equipment. The Chief laughingly says, "We no longer have smoke-eaters. Years ago you had to be brave and macho, and go in and eat alot of smoke. Because of materials today, you can't do that."

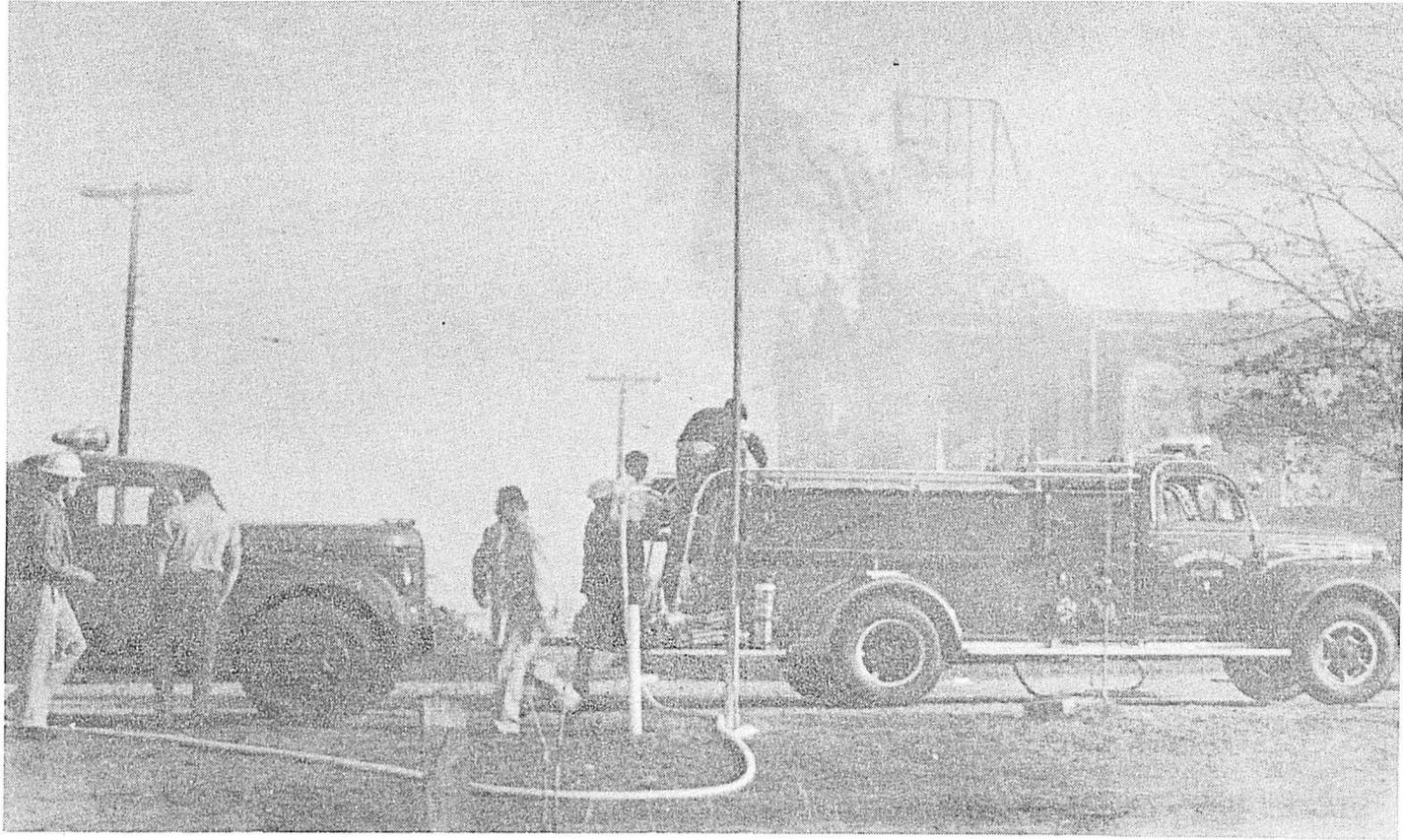
The organization is also active in fire prevention. Each year during Fire Prevention Week, the firemen host their own kick-off. Fliers are mailed to each resident of the district informing them of the department's activities during the week. Firemen distribute fire prevention literature and give fire engine rides, while Smokey the Bear makes his annual appearance. According to the Chief, many people are responsive to the department's efforts and are taught fire prevention during the week.

The Viewmont area is currently protected by twenty-one volunteers. Although the firemen were initially organized as a rural fire department, few areas of Viewmont retain the rural character of years past. Because the City of Hickory has extended water lines and hydrants throughout the area over the past five years, the Viewmont organization operates in a municipal-type setting. The extended water supply meant a lower insurance rating for the district - a classification of 5/9.

The Ladies Auxiliary was extremely active in the early years of the department. Momentum declined, and they reorganized in 1979. The ladies held an Open House celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the department in July, 1982. Approximately 250 guests attended. Currently, the auxiliary holds occasional bake sales, and are always present when the firemen need them.

Firemen are in the planning stages of purchasing a new pumper. Since water supplies have been extended, an existing tanker will be replaced by a pumper with a larger water capacity to streamline operations.

Viewmont is proud of its history. As the first rural volunteer organization in the County, the department intends to maintain a position of primacy in the eyes of the citizens they serve.





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