

Fireboats

New Hanover

THE FIREBOATS OF WILMINGTON, N.C.

Compiled by Bill Reaves, Local  
Historian, August, 1988.

The Great Fire of 1886 brought to the attention of the Wilmington citizens and government the importance of having a floating fire apparatus on the Cape Fear River equipped with the latest fire-fighting equipment to combat waterfront fires and those occurring on the many vessels which visited the port of Wilmington.

On February 21, 1886, the city of Wilmington was visited by one of the most disastrous fires in its history. Several blocks of businesses and residences located in the area surrounded by Grace Street from the river to Front Street, and thence northward along Front Street across the railroad terminals, and from the Front Street railroad station again to the river. Among the most important structures ravaged by the flames were the Clyde Steamship Lines terminals, Sprunt's Cotton Compresses, the Front Street Methodist Church, the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad freight yards and railroad shops, Paddy's Hollow district, etc. Many large residences along Front Street and Second Street were also destroyed.

The fire broke out on a Sunday about noon on the steamboat BLADEN, which was loaded with cotton, from Fayetteville, just as she was approaching her wharf near the foot of Chestnut Street. There was a strong wind from the southwest which carried the burning boat to the wharves of the Clyde Lines. The wharf and shed ignited and were soon in flames, and the fire thence spread rapidly.

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The local newspaper reported the following: The firemen fought manfully and determinedly, but their efforts were futile; nothing could stay the progress of the flames, which leaped and roared like a demon, sending aloft showers of sparks and burning brands, that the high winds carried and hurled on the roofs of buildings many blocks away from the raging conflagration. . . . Many of the firemen were also on duty throughout the night, extinguishing the burning debris and preventing other fires. They worked heartily and faithfully throughout the progress of the fire, and although their efforts seemed to be ineffectual, they really prevented a more disastrous conflagration. They fought the flames in front and rear unflinchingly and on the fire's flanks, all along the line, with the grim determination of veterans. Their water supply was inadequate. They were cut off from the river, except in the rear of the fire, and had to rely elsewhere entirely on the Water Works, and although these were working to their full capacity, the great drain upon it from the steamers and every hose that could be attached to fireplugs, greatly weakened the force of the streams.

In November, 1887, Captain Edgar Williams, of the tug MARIE, submitted a proposition to the Wilmington Board of Aldermen for a fire boat. It read as follows:

"We will have banked fires all night and full head of steam all day. And at night we will keep two men on board; one to attend to the boat and the other to give an alarm to the captain and engineer in case of need. We will at once, in case of fire on the river, report to the Chief of the Fire Department and act under his orders; provided, always, there is no shipping in danger. Should any vessel be in distress or require assistance it is clearly understood that we have liberty to assist them on our own account, and also that our claim for salvage shall not be hampered by our obligations to the city. Should there be no shipping in jeopardy we will tow flats or pump water, or act in any other way under the Chief of the Fire Department. We would at once buy a new, first class steam pump, and sufficient hose, under the requirements of the Fire Department for efficient use, the cost of which would be about \$800, at our own expense. For this service we ask \$80 per month, which we believe to be very moderate compensation." (WILMINGTON STAR, 11-11-1887)

By April of 1888, the Wilmington MESSENGER newspaper reported that "Captain Edgar Williams of the steam tug MARIE, is now in command of a fire department all to himself. Some weeks since it was mentioned that a steam pump and a hundred feet of hose had been put into his vessel to be used in case of fire in vessels in port, or in the event that fire broke out along the river front.

"The MARIE's fire apparatus has now been made more efficient by the addition of a hose for extinguishing fire in the hold of vessels by means of steam.

"The hose is attached to the boiler of the tug and when fire breaks out in the hold of a wooden vessel a hole is bored through

the deck, the nozzle is screwed into the hole and after fastening down the hatches and caulking everything tight the steam is forced into the hold. In iron vessels the nozzle of the hose is put through the hatchway and locked tight.

"This method of extinguishing fires is highly recommended in nautical circles, and is said to be the most effective yet discovered. The steam is forced into the hold and reaches every nook and corner of the vessel, exhausting the air and completely smothering all fire in an incredibly short time. The advantage it has is that the cargo is not damaged as is the case where water is employed."  
(WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 4-24-1888)

By March, 1897, Capt. Edgar Williams, was in command of a tug boat equipped for fire fighting, named the MARION. While fighting a fire at Murchison's rosin yard on the waterfront, he took time to make a few remarks to a newspaper reporter of the WILMINGTON DISPATCH, and they were as follows:

"Within the corporate limits of the city of Wilmington there are nearly three miles of river front. Property amounting in value to several millions of dollars lays within three blocks of the river - in fact the value of this property, it can be safely said, far exceeds one-half the value of the entire property within the city of Wilmington. It is important, therefore, that this property should receive all the police and fire protection necessary.

"In case of fire on or near the wharf the usual alarm is sent in and the fire department can be relied upon to be on hand before one can say "Jack Robinson." Frequently, the efforts of the department have been of little avail with the fires directly on the water front owing to its inability to fight the fire from the water side and upon these occasions the work of the tug MARION and her captain and crew has been of special value.

"The city should have a boat equipped with powerful pumps and always ready to steam to a fire on or near the river front. The fire protection of the city's wharf property and other property adjacent, will never be complete until such a boat is either owned by the city or some other arrangements made to secure the services of such a craft.

"One half of Eagles Island could be burned up before a lighter could be secured to take the engine and firemen over the river. This is not the fault of the firemen, however, but it is a pertinent fact whenever a fire occurs over on that side of the river. Supposing the whole department were engaged at a fire in Brooklyn or in the extreme eastern portion of the city, what protection have the wharves and the property adjoining?

"This reporter learned that Captain Williams for twenty-four years had been at almost every fire along the river front, with his tug MARION of late years, and the MARIE before the MARION.

"Captain Williams has never in all that time received a cent from the city for the service of his tug in doing firemen's work. Whenever Captain Williams has taken the firemen and engine over

the river he has been paid by the city, but he has never received any pay from the city for the use of the MARION and her crew as a fire engine and firemen, reports to the contrary notwithstanding.

"Some time ago, a committee was appointed by the chamber of commerce to confer with the Board of Aldermen in regard to paying so much a month to Captain Williams for the services of himself and tug at river front fires but the matter amounted to nothing as the board would not consider the proposition. It is hoped the matter will be brought before the next Board of Aldermen and satisfactorily arranged.

"Captain Williams said if the city would give him any encouragement he would put a new \$1,200 pump in the MARION, which would throw more water at a greater pressure than all the fire engines combined. The MARION had steam up night and day. No trouble ever interfered with her fire alarm (her whistle) or the supply or pressure of water. The whole Cape Fear would be sucked up before her usefulness at a fire would be terminated and if sufficient hose were provided and a new pump was installed six streams could play from the boat as far as the strength of the hose would permit. It is not exaggeration to say that any boat thus equipped would be worth more than the whole department on the wharf front.

"It is evident that more protection is needed along the wharf, and measures should be taken by the city to either buy a fire boat of its own or to make some agreement with the MARION or some other tug, to act in that capacity when a conflagration takes place along the waterfront.

"Chief Martin Newman, of the fire department, says such a boat would indeed a great help to the department in fires along the wharf. WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 3-10-1897)

On January 10, 1898, Captain Edgar D. Williams, once again sent another proposal to the Wilmington Board of Aldermen, which read as follows:

"The undersigned, E.D. Williams, manager of the Diamond Steamboat and Wrecking Company of Wilmington, N.C., chartered by special act of the legislature of North Carolina, and engaged in business of towing at this port, having made repeated proposals to the mayor and board of Aldermen, in previous years, to operate the steam tug MARION, as a fire boat for the protection of the wharves along the water front of Wilmington; and having failed to come to any arrangement or understanding, and the property owners along the said wharves having repeatedly urged him and his company to propose arrangements to the present mayor and board of aldermen, for the better protection of their property along these wharves, he hereby makes on behalf of himself and his company the following proposal:

"That they will equip the steam tug MARION, well known as a most capable and altogether suitable boat, with a steam fire engine of the most improved type, at their own expense. The capacity of the steam fire engine to be equal to that of any of the city fire engines both as to lifting power and general efficiency. They also propose to equip the said steam fire engine with sufficient

and proper hose and nozzles for first class work, under the direction of the chief of the fire department.

"They also propose to have the said steam fire boat MARION ready at all hours, day and night, in case of alarm, for prompt service, and that during the night the furnace fire will be banked, and connections made for immediate emergency.

" The expense of this new machinery and appliances to be borne entirely by the owners of the boat and to be their property, and the service to be for the protection of wharves, and city property on the wharves in Wilmington, including the west side of the river and Point Peter. It is also prosed that in case of fire a block or more away from the river front, that the boat will connect its hose with that of the city fire department, and act in concert with the department under the direction of the chief of the department; in consideration of which the said E.D. Williams, manager and his company, ask a compensation of \$1500 a year payable quarterly, and the contract to extend for four (4) years, as a shorter term would not justify the necessary expenditure for the proposed improved machinery and service.

" The said manager and company having served the city effectively with their present fire apparatus on the MARION, for a number of years past without any compensation whatever, it is hoped that in view of this fact, preference will be given them for further paid service."

(WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 1-11-1898.)

- . Captain Williams ran into competition from the Navassa Guano Company who offered to equip their boat, the HENRY CHRISTIAN, as a fire boat to patrol the river front for \$900 a year, underbidding Williams by \$600. Wilmington Alderman Gore suggested having sealed bids for furnishing protection to the river front. (WILMINGTON STAR, 2-8-1898)

The WILMINGTON MESSENGER, dated February 8, 1898, reported that Capt. Williams "said his bid was opened and published without calling for bids, and since then he learned that other parties had put in a bid. He wanted to say that his company would reduce its bid if the board of aldermen would call for sealed bids."

It was found necessary on February 12, 1898 to make several changes in the specifications drawn up at a meeting held by Aldermen D.L.Gore and C.D.Morrill and Fire Chief Charles Schnibben and Asst.Fire Chief W.P.Monroe. About the different requirements in the specifications, Alderman D.L.Gore was kept busy consulting with well known engineers and masters of steam

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tugs in Wilmington. (WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 2-13-1898.)

One week later, on February 19, 1898, the special fire boat committee, including Gore, Morrill and Schnibben, signed the specifications for the proposed fireboat.

Briefly stated, "It must carry 500 feet of hose, with pipe and nozzles as carried by steam fire engine companies; a pump of not less than 750 gallons per minute capacity; must maintain 50 lbs steam pressure; must keep on board not less than two men, and all others employed must have fire alarms in their dwellings. "The boat must have a specified wharf where it must await alarms, and must answer all alarms from Front street or west of that street and from fire alarm boxes at Cape Fear Lumber Co. and the Hilton Lumber Co.

"The specifications also detail the rules and regulations to which the boat and her crew must be subject, all of which will be published later should the Board of Aldermen decided to establish the fireboat. Of course the boat is to be subject to the officers of the city fire department."  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 2-20-1898.)

Due to the unsettled political scene following the overthrow of the city government in November, 1898, the subject of a fireboat was lost in the files.

In November, 1903, the Board of Aldermen approved the proposition made by Captain E.D. Williams to equip the tug MARION as a fire boat. Not a dissenting voice was heard on the subject. Every business man in Wilmington seemed to realize finally that more fire protection was needed along the waterfront. By reducing the risk of fire the insurance rates would naturally be lower. The cost of the fireboat was to be \$1,250 a year. On November 3rd, the Wilmington Board of Audit and Finance agreed to Capt. Edgar Williams' proposition and a contract was drawn up and signed.  
(WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 11-4-1903.)

Captain Williams had agreed to equip his tug with a pump of 1,000 gallons per minute capacity; and to have the boat in readiness at all times to respond to alarms from the waterfront,

keeping the fire under the boiler banked and one or two men aboard at all times, who shall be competent to man the tug. The city is to furnish the hose and nozzles sufficient for the equipment. A detachable alarm will be kept aboard the boat at night so as to facilitate the work.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 4-22-1904.)

#### ATLANTIC I.

In June, 1905, an appropriation of \$2,000 was made for the construction and equipping of a new fireboat for the city of Wilmington. The vessel was to be about 50 feet in length overall and built on the dead-rise plan. She was to be propelled by a 25 horsepower engine and the vessel was to be centrally stationed along the waterfront, so that within ten minutes of the time an alarm is sounded for any part of the harbor, she can be on the scene of the fire. On board the boat was to be installed the old "Atlantic" engine, which was a powerful apparatus capable of throwing 600 gallons of water per minute.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 8-25-1905)

Without the usual ceremonies, such as breaking a bottle of champagne or wine, etc., Wilmington's new fireboat was launched at 15 minutes to 2 o'clock on the afternoon of February 13, 1906. Only a few persons were present besides those whose work it was to hammer out the stays and wedges and allow the boat to glide off the ways. The builder, Louis Wennerwald, could not wait for more of the city officials to be present because of the changing tide. Had he waited longer, the tide would have been too low for the launching. The officials who were absent included Fire Chief Schnibben and the Fire Committee of the Board of Aldermen.

The launching took place at the foot of Queen Street in front of contractor Wennerwald's boat house. About 20 persons, mostly women and children, who were gathered on a slight slope some 30 or 40 yards back from the water's edge, witnessed the launching, besides the small gathering of men down in the area between the boat house and the river.

The ATLANTIC, it having already been named, was built on the dead-rise plan. She was 51 feet in length, 11½ feet beam and constructed entirely of wood. Work began on the boat, December 14, 1905, and was nearly completed when launched. All that remained was the installation of the engine which furnished motive power and the fire engine "Atlantic" and the building of the deck house.

The ATLANTIC was built by Mr. Louis Wennerwald, assisted by Mr. J.F.Gaskill. The motive power was to be supplied by a Globe 25 horse-power gasoline engine, which was to be installed by Captain H. Hall. The engine was to be installed on February 14th, at the wharf between Castle and Queen Streets, where the ATLANTIC was moored after the launching.

The fire engine was not to be installed until it could be replaced by the regular fire department, as it was still doing duty on a regular fire engine in the city.  
(WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 2-13-1906)

ATLANTIC I was given her first trial trip and speed test on the Cape Fear River, March 20, 1906. On board was Fire Chief Schnibben and the members of the Fire Committee from the Board of Aldermen. The ATLANTIC departed from her moorings at the Custom House wharf.

Following the tests, the ATLANTIC was commissioned and those

placed in charge of the new fireboat were Messrs. B.R.Russell and J.H.Litgen, each doing a 12-hour shift each day. This allowed one man on board the vessel at all hours of day or night. It was reported that the fireboat would answer all alarms from certain fire-boxes, all those along the waterfront, Water, Nutt and Front streets, and at all the factories and mills near the river.(WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 3-29,1906.)

The new fireboat was christened as the ATLANTIC by Mr.Rathjen in honor of the old Atlantic Steam Fire Engine Company. Mr. Rathjen was chairman of the city's Fire Committee.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 3-29-1906)

The official measurements of the fireboat registered at the United States Custom House showed a gross tonnage of 14.51 and a net register of 10.16. The indicated horse power was 25. The length was 50.2 feet and the beam, 11.2 feet. She drew 3 feet of water and the big Atlantic engine was installed forward in her hull.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 3-30-1906.)

Another trial trip was held on April 3, 1906 for Fire Committee Chairman Rathjen, Aldermen W.E.Yopp and W.W.King, of the Fire Committee, and Fire Chief Schnibben, also Wilmington Mayor Waddell and a few other friends as their guests. The party went up to the Hilton Bridge and while there took the occasion to inspect the new filter plant of the Clarendon Water Works Co. Returning to the city, the boat was tied up at Market Street dock. The vessel was now in regular service and was prepared to answer any and all alarms from the wharf district.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 4-4-1906.)

The fireboat ATLANTIC received its first call from the waterfront on April 17, 1906. Twenty-five bales of cotton got afire from a spark at the Seaboard Railroad warehouses and the fireboat

responded to the alarm in just ten minutes. Although it was not needed the ATLANTIC had up steam and was prepared for an emergency in a short time. The damage to the cotton, which was consigned to Alexander Sprunt & Son, was only about \$150.

Buckets were used in putting out the flames.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 4-18-1906.)

It was announced on August 11, 1906, that the location of the fireboat had been changed from Market Street dock to the Custom House dock. Captain Ben Russell, the veteran engineer of the Wilmington Fire Department, was to be in charge of the boat and was to spend all his time on the craft.  
(WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 8-11-1906)

On November 10, 1908, Mr. Louis Wennerwold, the builder of ATLANTIC I, died at the James Walker Memorial Hospital. He was a native of Denmark and had been a boat builder in Wilmington for about 20 years. He was 42 years of age and was interred in the Bellevue Cemetery. The pall-bearers were selected from the Ship Carpenters' Union, and included J.W. McCartney, J.W. Ward, Richard McCabe and T.F. Gaskill.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 11-11-1908.)

A permanent headquarters for the crew of the fireboat was under construction at the foot of Chestnut Street in April, 1907. The ATLANTIC was to be stationed permanently at the Chestnut Street dock when the headquarters were completed. A fire alarm bell was to be installed in the new building.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 4-27-1907.)

#### ATLANTIC II.

ATLANTIC II. was built in 1911 by Captain Jim Arnold, a Southport fisherman, who put the very best pine and oak timbers available into her, plus the skill gained from a long life of boat building

and sailing. Jim Arnold had originally planned to use this boat in his shrimping industry but was persuaded to sell her to the city of Wilmington. She has an over-all length of 50 feet with a 14 foot beam.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 1-19-1947)

Mr. Sherwood Brockwell, of the North Carolina Bureau of Fire Prevention, which was connected with the State Insurance Department, announced in January, 1915 that "Wilmington is the only city in three States - Virginia, North and South Carolina - that has a fireboat." He was in Wilmington to inspect the new pump and engine which had just been installed in the ATLANTIC. The new pump had a capacity of 14,000 gallons a minute and could be run up to 14,550 in an emergency. It was mentioned by Mr. Brockwell that Charleston, Norfolk and other seaport towns still used tugboats for fighting fires that occurred along their waterfronts. It was Mr. Brockwell's intention to return to Wilmington in the near future when the new fire station at the corner of 5th and Castle Streets when completed.  
(WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 1-15-1915.)

In February, 1915, it was announced that the fireboat ATLANTIC was again in commission and ready for service.

"With the exception of a last coat of paint, the ATLANTIC is complete. Fitted with a Globe gasoline engine of 25-horsepower for propelling purposes, it will have a speed of about ten knots an hour. The American LaFrance gasoline pumper recently installed with a pumping capacity of 1,400 gallons per minute will throw five streams with a working pressure of 180 pounds behind them. It is estimated, from tests so far made, that a fire within 300 feet of any nozzle can be effectively fought.

"In addition to installing the machinery, the Cape Fear Machine Works, of Wilmington, have just completed a steel house on the boat. This addition renders the boat practically fireproof and will enable it to do its work as a fire fighter under conditions which would make it impossible for the ordinary fireboat to even attempt.

"A demonstration will be given this week, probably Wednesday, at the wharf at the foot of Chestnut street, at which time the citizens of Wilmington will have an opportunity to view the

workings of this up-to-date vessel.

(WILMINGTON STAR, 2-14-1915; WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 2-15-1915)

During the year, 1920, the city of Wilmington considered the purchase of a submarine chaser, for the purpose of converting it into a fireboat. The United States Navy was offering 141 of these boats for sale, and 9 of them were moored in fresh water near Charleston. Savannah had purchased two of them to be converted into fireboats, and Jacksonville, Fla., was negotiating for the purchase of one or more.

"Charles Schnibben, Wilmington's fire chief, said that Wilmington was the first city in the south to have a fireboat for combating fires along the waterfront, and the buildings saved from destruction by fire through the use of the present fireboat, the ATLANTIC, make a fire fighting boat indispensable to Wilmington. The vessel is not sufficiently large to to install additional pumping equipment, is such is necessary."

The boats were built by the Navy at a cost of \$80,000 each and the selling price was from \$10,000 to \$13,000. They were wooden hull vessels; length, 110 feet over all; extreme breadth, 15 feet, 4 inches. Each boat was equipped with three Standard Marine gas engines, six cylinders and 220-horse power each, at 460 revolutions a minute. Each boat had three propellers, and at full speed averages 18 knots an hour. Blueprints had been prepared by the government, showing how these submarine chasers could be changed into fire-fighting boats.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 11-22-1920)

The matter of purchasing one of these vessels was discussed through May, 1921.

On account of World War I (1918-1919) and the desire to keep the best protection on the waterfront possible during the time that the enemies of this country were destroying ships, wharfs and docks by incendiary fires and bombs, it was thought best not to

haul the boat up on a marine railway for repairs and a check-up. In October, 1920, Councilman James M. Hall, head of the department of public safety in Wilmington, announced that the fireboat would be removed from the river for ten days for any repairs that might be needed. After making an investigation it was found that the Atlantic did not need to be put on the ways and the work was accomplished much sooner than had been expected. A general overhauling of the equipment and the boat's engine was made and the vessel was reported to be in excellent condition.

(WILMINGTON STAR, 10-18-1920; WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 10-31-1920)

In May, 1921, the ATLANTIC was hauled on the marine railway of R.F.Hamme & Sons, on Eagles Island, and received a general overhauling. Her hull was thoroughly scraped and painted, and again in August, 1922, she was hauled out again and given "a coat of blood red paint on the housing which will greatly add to the appearance of the craft."  
(WILMINGTON DISPATCH, 5-11-1921;8-20-1922)

The fireboat ATLANTIC made a trial run in January, 1924 with a new 4-cylinder Palmer gas engine, which was 35-horse power, which was 10-horse power more than the old Globe engine. The Palmer gas engine was bought through the Marine Supply Company for \$1,600. At this time there were two crews manning the ATLANTIC, Captain Henry Litgen and L.R.Frost, his mate, and Captain D.G.Smith and Charles Register, his mate. Each pair served 12 hours out of the 24, one pair on days and one on nights, alternating from night to day and day to night weekly.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 1-31-1924)

Again in April, 1925, the ATLANTIC received a new coat of red paint on the upperworks and a coat of gray paint on the hull.  
(WILMINGTON NEWS-DISPATCH, 4-1-1925)

The Wilmington City Council, in October, 1926, were requesting bids for the construction of new headquarters for the fireboat crew at the foot of Grace Street. Workmen were already making considerable progress on the construction of a slip for the ATLANTIC, and when it was completed it was to be the most modern along the city's waterfront.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 10-19-1926)

The work on the new headquarters for the ATLANTIC's crew was progressing well in January, 1927. The brick work was already above the first floor. The erection of the station at the foot of Grace Street afforded a more central location for the fireboat, placing it in position to better protect waterfront property.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 1-30-1927)

The ATLANTIC crew were proud of their mascot, Peter, the tomcat, which they adopted in 1929. The cat received some publicity in August, 1932, as "the only fishing tomcat in the world." Members of the crew would bait up their fish hooks, put corks on the lines, and cast them in the river. The cat would sit nearby where he could watch the corks and when a fish took a bite, the cat would nod its head, and the fisherman would haul out the fish.  
(WILMINGTON STAR, 8-12-1932)

The funeral of Captain Graham Smith was held on May 1, 1933 from his residence, 1519 Castle Street. He was a captain of the fireboat ATLANTIC for the last 8 years of his life, and had been a member of Wilmington Fire Department for about 30 years, 20 years of which he served in various capacities on the fireboat. He was 55 years old at the time of death and a native of Wilmington. Interment was in Oakdale Cemetery. (WILMINGTON NEWS, 5-1-1933)

The 24-year-old fireboat ATLANTIC II was rebuilt and renovated in 1938. The work was begun in April and finished in July of that year. About \$600 was appropriated to replace the superstructure

and decks of the vessel. Because the work was done by members of the department, the cost was only \$440. After the work was completed, city officials were given a brief trip up the Northeast Cape Fear River. Aboard were Mayor Thomas E. Cooper, also J.E.L. Wade, commissioner of public works, and W.Louis Fisher, commissioner of finance, and Fire Chief J.L.Croom. L.R.Frost was captain of the ATLANTIC, and C.H.Register was lieutenant of the fireboat company. When the fireboat returned to their dock at the foot of Grace Street, members of the crew demonstrated the use of its fire fighting equipment, streams of water spraying buildings at a distance of 250 feet. The nozzle had a pressure of 90 pounds and the pumping machine a pressure of 110 pounds. The equipment included 800 feet of 2½ inch hose and 300 feet of 3-inch hose. There was a capacity of pouring out 870 gallons of water per minute. During the tour it was discovered that the ATLANTIC had no anchor, and Fire Chief Croom explained one would be secured as soon as possible. (WILMINGTON STAR, 7-10-1938)

Installation of a new 150-horse power marine motor in the fireboat ATLANTIC was begun on April 29, 1942. The speed of the boat was increased approximately 75 per cent with the installation of the new motor.(WILMINGTON NEWS, 4-29-1942)

### ATLANTIC III.

On January 8, 1947, City Manager J.R.Benson, Fire Chief J.Luddie Croom, Gilbert F. Morton, City Purchasing Agent, and Captain C.H. Register, of the fireboat ATLANTIC, went to Charleston, S.C., to investigate the possible purchase of a replacement for the ATLANTIC II. The boat under consideration was 65 feet long and a 16½ foot beam. It was built in Charleston in 1943.

A staff writer for the WILMINGTON STAR newspaper wrote the following on January 19, 1947,

"A sleek new fire boat, its engine purring a gentle powerful tune will soon plough its way up the Cape Fear and anchor at the Grace Street docks, and the aged and battle-scarred ATLANTIC will chug-chug its way into the realm of the yet unknown, perhaps the scrap heap, if negotiations underway between city officials and Washington bigwigs are successful.

"Equally as elusive as the drag-line the city has been seeking for the past several months, a fire boat to replace the ATLANTIC appears nearer within the purchasing powers of the city than at any time during the four years chase the department has given.

"The new boat must be in keeping with modern methods of fire-fighting as learned by the six men who now command the ATLANTIC, according to Fire Chief J.Ludie Croom who says that he has found the type boat he wants at the Naval Reserve Fleet in Charleston, S.C.

"The ATLANTIC which the city has used as a fire boat for the past 36 years has an over-all length of 50 feet with a 14 foot beam. She is skippered by Captain Charles Register who on last Wednesday celebrated his 27th anniversary aboard the faithful ship.

"From the tip of the ATLANTIC's bow to the sternmost part of her fantail, the devout river craft is today considered in top condition despite her age. Engines and pumping facilities are kept in A-1 condition for any emergency.

"She glides along the river at 14 miles per hour today, and members of her crew proudly point out that just recently she made a two-mile trip down the river to the shipyard in less than 12 minutes flat. The still sturdy fire-fighting equipment aboard the craft is poised in readiness daily and according to records at the station house, is hauled to answer an average of about 35 alarms per year.

"The ATLANTIC carries 1,000 feet of hose aboard and at full steam ahead commands the respect of all river craft in time of stress, despite the fact that she resembles an ordinary shrimper and carries no distinguishing siren alarms. Her appearance and her stock whistles are her only distinguishing features except for the long nozzles pointing skyward through the cabin top.

"Several shrimpers today are vieing for the purchase of the ATLANTIC when she is declared surplus by the city.

"At the Grace Street fire docks, the only place along the waterfront wharves that a person may freely practice the use of tobacco burning pipes and cigarettes, the crew of the ATLANTIC pursue daily tasks of an environment steeped with the tangy marshy air which makes members feel at home.

"All the members chose the ATLANTIC because they were either born and reared "on the Sound" where they could see and feel the atmosphere of which the Cape Fear river patrol offers a counterpart.

"The two-platoon system of working the water shift was originated in Wilmington in 1919 by Captain J.H.Litgen, skipper in charge of the ATLANTIC then. He was ably assisted in his duties by Lieutenant G.G.Smith, who later left the fire boat's employ. Others on the force at the time were L.R.Frost, Sr., who became city fire inspector in 1943, and Register.

"Frost was made captain of the boat in 1933 and Register was upped to the rank of lieutenant on the same day the latter succeeding the former in command of the vessel when Frost was made inspector in 1943.

"Alonza Russ who serves next in command to Register became a lieutenant on the force in 1943. He has 12 years service on the boat and has been a member of the fire department 18 years.

"On present duty, besides Register and Russ, are Privates H.F. Watters, Ralph Powell and E.A. Jones, who came to the ATLANTIC several years ago and E.E. Casteen who has 11 years service aboard the craft.

"Captain Register said that the faithful hull has done "her duty well, but Wilmington needs a new boat with facilities for modern methods of fighting fires." For 15 years the ATLANTIC has been deteriorating and each year since 1930 she has been pulled to the dry docks for repairs. During the past year her ailments have increased and she has been undergoing extensive repairs, which have put her in "tip-top" shape as nearly as could be for a boat her age.

"The men who work in relays of three to a shift - 12 hours each day with one day off each week - may get more help if a new and bigger boat is bought.

"But all look forward with regret to the time Captain Register retires. He says it will be soon but wants to help the boys get started on their new boat and "everything straightened out first."

"Meanwhile crew members go about their work with vim and during the 12 hours on duty are allowed to take "cat naps" upstairs in the station's spotless lounge room.

"The beds are comfortable, but sleep is not easy when you expect an alarm to sound any minute. And the aggravating thing about the alarm is that it is permanently placed high on a wall, well out of arms reach making it impossible to drowsily reach out and cut it off."

(WILMINGTON STAR, 1-19-1947)

The city of Wilmington was the high bidder on a P-76 boat at Charleston, it was announced on September 30, 1947. This vessel would be converted into a fireboat. Approximately 450 boats were placed on bid-sale and at the close of bidding time Wilmington was high on the Charleston craft.

(WILMINGTON NEWS, 9-30-1947)

A sad obituary type article appeared in the WILMINGTON STAR newspaper dated November 24, 1947, and it read as follows:

"ATLANTIC OBITUARY - Funeral arrangements are pending for the Wilmington fire boat "Atlantic" which is soon to be replaced in active duty by the P-76, a new boat purchased recently by the city in Charleston, S.C., and due to be brought here this week for outfitting.

"The old "Atlantic", veteran of a score of spectacular harbor fires, has been in service 35 years, according to Fire Chief J. Ludie Croom. She is survived by her skipper, Captain Charles

H. Register, who has commanded her for the past 27 years. "After the "Atlantic" has been stripped of such serviceable fire fighting equipment as can be used on the new boat, the old hulk will probably be sold for salvage.

"The final destination of the "Atlantic," like that of all deceased, is unknown. But if she should be held liable for the sins of some of her crew members and be sent to Hades - a contingency regarded as unlikely by all who knew her - her crew is ready to wager that she can even put out the fire in the infernal regions."

(WILMINGTON STAR, 11-24-1947)

On November 29, 1947, the WILMINGTON MORNING STAR reported:

"The P-76 recently purchased by the city as government surplus property from the United States Maritime Commission in Charleston, S.C., after a six-year hunt, will arrive on the Cape Fear River on Monday. She has a 21 foot beam and 64 feet, 8 inches in length. The P-76, with a draft of six or seven feet of water, is equipped with a 225 horsepower diesel engine, a ship to shore radio, and lifeboats."

By June, 1948, the new fireboat had been completely overhauled, and the new housing completed. No name had yet been decided for the new boat. In December, 1948, two 1,000-gallon per minute pumping units arrived for the new fireboat and by that date it had been decided to christen her as the ATLANTIC III. A new wharf was built for the new fireboat at the foot of Grace Street.

The National Board of Fire Underwriters prepared a report on the Fire Department of Wilmington, N.C. which was published in April, 1958, and the following was written about Wilmington's fireboat.

"FIREBOAT - The fireboat "Atlantic III," built in 1943 and acquired by the city in 1948, has a wooden hull 64 feet 11 inches long, with a beam of 14 feet 6 inches and a draft of 4 feet. It is powered by an 8-cylinder diesel engine of 230 horsepower at 1500 rpm. Two Mack pumping units, each consisting of a 6-cylinder 200-horse-power gasoline engine-driven 1250-gpm centrifugal pump, take suction through individual sea chests and discharge into 6-inch welded gated pipes delivering water to two fixed turrets on steel framework towers, one forward above the pilot house and one above the afterdeck; each have tips with a maximum diameter of 2 inches. Two pairs of 2½-inch gated outlets on each side of the engine housing are fed by 4-inch pipes connected to the 6-inch pipe. Valves and piping are so arranged that either unit may discharge through either turret but the gated outlets are supplied only from the line leading to the after-turret. It is equipped with 3-way radio on the police department system.

"Tests of the units were witnessed during this survey to determine their condition. When the units were installed in 1948 they delivered a combined capacity of 2500-gpm at 150 pounds pump pressure but at the time of this survey they delivered only 2255-gpm at the same pressure. Each unit is tested annually by the department to deliver 1000-gpm at 150 pounds pump pressure."

The ATLANTIC III was the last wooden hull fireboat to cruise the Cape Fear River. She was replaced in 1961.

#### ATLANTIC IV.

ATLANTIC IV. was a 64-foot steel-hull tugboat, originally named the T.B. McCLINTICK. It was launched from the Bath Iron Works, Maine, in February, 1932. She was initially used by the United States Public Health Service as a quarantine boat and later as an icebreaker in Curtis Bay, Maryland. (WILMINGTON STAR, 11-7-1987)

After the ATLANTIC IV had been in service for about six years, the WILMINGTON SUNDAY STAR-NEWS, dated October 8, 1967, reported that "A lot of people don't even realize we have a fireboat, but we do and it is a very good one and serves a very real purpose," said D.E. Millinor, Chief of the Wilmington Fire Dept.

"Wilmington holds quite a distinction among fire departments because of the boat. This is the only city in North Carolina that has a fireboat, and it is the only east coast city between Jacksonville, Fla., and Norfolk, Va., with one.

"Lt. F.H. Killelte, the officer in charge of one of the companies that mans the fire boat, offered the following statistics on ATLANTIC IV: length-62 feet; beam-15 feet; draft-8 to 9 feet; weight-92 tons; speed-approximately 12 knots.

"Lt. Killelte had been with the fire department almost 19 years and has been a part of the boat crew the entire time.

"The hull of the ATLANTIC IV is made of charcoal steel, one of the best materials and also one which is very difficult to get any more. The boat is put together with rivets; there is no welding in it.

"ATLANTIC IV will continue on and on in use according to both Lt. Killelte and Chief Millinor. It is so well constructed and of such good material that they cannot foresee a time when fire boat number five will have to be procured.

"About every two years, the boat is taken out of the water and put on a railway to be scraped and painted.

"The fireboat crew maintains the boat for minor repairs and keeping it in tip top shape. They also do most of the painting. The present berth for ATLANTIC IV is at the foot of Queen Street at a dock of the American Molasses Company.

"The old fireboat station was demolished by urban renewal, and Chief Millinor said they hope to eventually be permanently berthed at the foot of Market Street. The future plans call for an extension of the government dock at the Federal Building to accommodate the fire boat.

"ATLANTIC IV has a two-way radio, air operated controls, steam heat, a foam machine for use in combating an oil slick on the water, 1000 feet of 2½ inch hose and 400 feet of 1½ inch hose. It also carried 500 gallons of fuel.

"To protect the boat itself when it is fighting a fire, there is a pipe that surrounds the boat which throws up a shower curtain of water. This steady stream of water, completely circling the boat, sprays 20 feet into the air and also protects the firemen so they can move the boat right up to the dock and the blaze.

"Lt. Killelte, speaking with pride about ATLANTIC IV, said, "One story we like to tell is about how we did something the whole Japanese Navy tried to do but couldn't. We sunk the USS

NORTH CAROLINA." This was done to keep the ship steady in its berth, and Lt. Killette said they pumped seven tons of water a minute for six hours a day, approximately 30 days."  
(SUNDAY STAR-NEWS, 10-8-1967)

By November, 1979, Fire Chief Robert Shipp was reported as saying that "the ATLANTIC IV is due for replacement soon." The firemen agreed that one of the ATLANTIC's serious handicaps was that it drew nine feet of water, making it nearly impossible to use in many parts of the river. "The worst places, Shipp and L.G. Thomas, chief of training for the fire department, said, are the shallow waters between the tanker loading piers and the oil terminals on the river's east bank. The fireboat cannot get close enough to shore to reach a burning tank farm, for example. Thomas said the city needs a vessel drawing only two or three feet. According to Shipp, the city is looking, but he does not expect a replacement to be available for several years. The current vessel cost the city \$300 in 1961.

"One of the first duties of the ATLANTIC IV in the city's service was to wash down the decks of the USS NORTH CAROLINA before the dedication of the battleship as a war memorial."  
(WILMINGTON MORNING STAR, 11-12-1979.)

It was in 1984 that the beginning of the end for the ATLANTIC IV started. The city of Wilmington purchased a 1962 Navy surplus fireboat to replace the old vessel. It was to take two years and \$200,000 to restore the new vessel for service on the Cape Fear river at the port of Wilmington.

David Harless purchased the ATLANTIC IV on March 9, 1987 from the city of Wilmington for \$5,555.95, the highest in three bids. A program of restoration was begun by Harless to return the vessel to its original appearance as a tugboat. It was moved to a site on the west bank of the Cape Fear River at the Bordeaux Salvage and Construction Company location. It was estimated that it would take two years to restore the vessel and the cost would be about \$50,000. It was Harless' dream to have the vessel become a floating museum with free admission. Harless was an experienced marine engineer formerly employed by the N.C. Department of Transportation at Ocracoke.  
WILMINGTON MORNING STAR, 11-7-1987)

#### ATLANTIC V.

In September, 1986, Wilmington's newest fireboat was tested on the Cape Fear River. Fire Chief Lloyd Wolfe, on his first voyage in the vessel, said "I'm pleased with it, but it's been a long process." The city received the 1962 Navy surplus fireboat four years earlier and it had just completed a two-year, \$200,000 restoration.

"As the boat headed down the river, city fire officials said the two years of work would provide the department with new abilities and versatility in fighting waterfront fires. The new fireboat had four times the power of the old tugboat, drew

much less water and was easier to maneuver.

"The new boat's four GM six-cylinder engines could move the boat as fast as 16 mph, three times of speed of ATLANTIC IV. When the new vessel arrived in Wilmington for repairs, it was windowless, corroding and taking on water. The workers hurriedly lifted it out of the water. Everything in it had to be rebuilt, according to Bob Honeycutt, one of the mechanics who worked on her.

(WILMINGTON MORNING STAR, 9-14-1986)

In 1988, the ATLANTIC V. was moved to a new berth at the Riverfront Park, near the foot of Market Street.

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