

A Fireman's Prayer

*When I am called to duty, God
Wherever flames may rage;
Give me the strength to save some life,
Whatever be its age.*

*Help me to embrace a little child
Before it is too late,
Or save an older person from
The horror of that fate.*

*Enable me to be alert
And hear the weakest shout
And quickly and efficiently
Put the fire out.*

*I want to fill my calling and
To give the best in me,
To guard my every neighbor and
Protect his property.*

*And if according to your will,
I have to close my life,
Please, bless with your protecting hand,
My children and my wife.*



1913 - 1992



History of the Winston-Salem Fire Department

The Winston-Salem Fire Department has two separate origins; the Salem Fire Department which originated in 1772, and the Winston Fire Department which originated in 1876. The Winston and the Salem Fire Departments merged in 1913.

In the Town of Salem, they appointed Fire Inspectors who made the rounds of the town examining all the fireplaces and noting

anything that seemed dangerous. The Brethren also made arrangements to purchase leather fire buckets from Pennsylvania at a cost of one dollar each. A Fire Inspector's Committee was set up in 1782. This committee checked on the care and sweeping of chimneys and related fire prevention matters. The only fire fighting equipment available at

this time was leather fire buckets to carry water and ladders placed at designated locations at buildings throughout town. Water was supplied by ponds and cisterns. The Brethren were extremely careful to take every possible precaution against fire hazards. They believed that prevention was the best protection against possible fires. Probably



Old Engine #2.



Winston Firefighter Tom Flynn.

Highlights of 1955

New Equipment

- 1,000 G.P.M. Mack Pumper
- 85-foot Seagraves Aerial ladder truck
- Dodge station wagon (Asst. Chiefs)
- Ford Sedan (Training and Fire Prevention)

Additional Personnel

- Full-time Training Supervisor – L.C. Williams
- Clerk-Stenographer III – Mrs. Lucille Pegram
- Total Personnel – 131

Fire Prevention Inspections: 6,689

Firemen's Training Program: 13,329 (Hours)

Civil Defense Sirens: (New Installations) 24

Rescue and Emergency Alarms: (Other than fires) – 95

	1954	1955
Deaths because of fires (public)	4	4
Fire Loss	\$435,266	\$447,621
Firemen injured in the line of duty	9	4
Leading Causes of fire		
1st – Carelessness with smoking materials and matches		
2nd – Defectivs wiring		
3rd – Carelessness with heating equipment		

the most noted fire company of Salem's earlier days was the "Rough and Ready Company" that protected the town until paid companies of Twin City took over. As a result of this, there were few minor fires in Salem.

It does not appear that the people of Winston were as conscious of the hazards of fire as were the people of Salem at first.



First Fire Chief of Winston-Salem (B.L. Hooper).

The first action governing the safety of the Town of Winston from the ravages of fire was taken on April 30, 1866. The Town Board appointed a Committee to visit all the houses in town, to examine the buildings,



Training at night.

and to talk with citizens to see if they were protected and secured against fires.

In 1880, on a motion by Commissioner J.W. Alspaugh, Dr. J.A. Bium was authorized and instructed

to organize a Fire Company of twenty-four (24) men in accordance with a plan to be drawn up by the Mayor and Secretary and which plan would be an order of this Board. Under the plan, these twenty-four men would range in age from 18 to 45 years. The Company was to be headed by a Captain and such other



Relaxing after the Kimberly Park fire.

officers as needed for the company. The By-Laws provided that the Captain would serve a two-year term.

Two years later, the Town Board divided the town into four wards. The fire alarm bell rang in such a manner as to indicate in which ward the fire occurred. Later that same year, the Town Board decided to

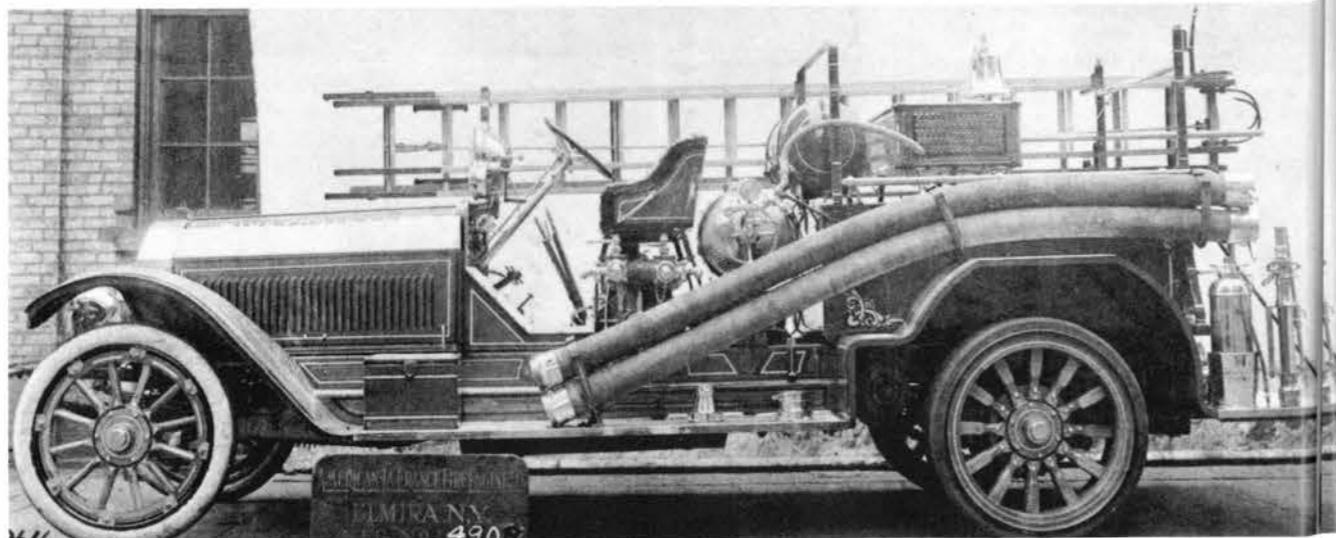
purchase a steam fire engine. A LaFrance Steam Fire Engine was purchased for \$3,800. It was decided that the fire engine should be housed on the east side of Liberty Street.

The first mention of firefighter pay was in 1886, when Captain Gales of the fire department requested the Board to allow a payment of \$2.00 to each fireman for service at every fire.

As both towns grew, it seemed the time was right to consolidate. This town became known as Winston-Salem. The Town Board



Chief H.E. Nissen.



American LaFrance Fire Engine.



Chief Hobson poses with Firefighters.



Chief W.G. Hobson.

voted for improvements for the fire department and selected R.L. Hooper as the first Fire Chief of the newly merged fire department.

At the Board meeting on August 2, 1912, Alderman J.W. Dalton, a member of the Fire Committee, made the following recommendations:

1. That the City purchase another steamer.
2. That more paid men should be added to the department so that more men could go out on the first alarm.
3. That the fire hydrants which were set with the taps next to the sidewalk should be changed.

The Board approved these recommendations and authorized the Fire Committee to get full information as to the needs of the fire department and such other information that might be necessary to make a full report to the Board.

The first motorized fire apparatus was ordered on August 5, 1912, and was purchased from American LaFrance Fire Engine Company. This apparatus was a "One Type 12 Triple Combination Motor Car" and was purchased for \$9,000. The apparatus was housed at Fire Station Number 2 on the corner of Fourth and Main Streets. The Board had also voted to increase this station by two more men; making a total of six. A request was made for an increased of \$5.00 per month in their salaries. This request was from Assistant Chief J.H. Holmes.

On January of the following year, the Mayor read a letter from J.R. Young, State Insurance Commissioner. This letter stated that it was the duty of the Board to elect two members of the Board as Trustees of the Firemen's Relief Fund.



Chief L.C. Williams receives a new car from Chief Brown.



Firefighters battle the weather as well as the fire.



Pump test.



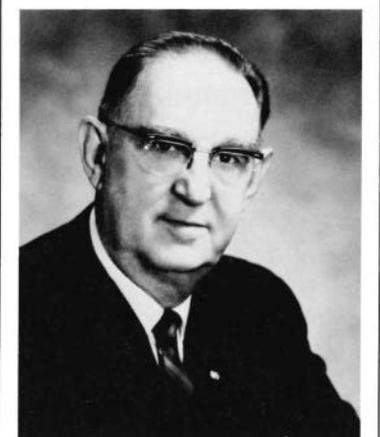
Chief L.C. Williams Poses with the City's first all-black Fire Company; John Meredith, John Ford, Willie Carter, Lester Ervin, Raphael Black, Robert Grier, George Penn, and Roy Thomas.

The Board elected two members of the Fire Committee as Trustees to the Firemen's Relief Fund.

The first scandal in the fire department happened in 1912 when Fire Chief R.L. Hooper appeared before the Board and stated that he had condemned certain valuable properties belonging to several prominent and influential citizens. He then requested, and received permission to be absent from the City for two months. It was not ascertained if there was a connection between the condemnation and the request for absence from the City. The property belonged to Mr. P.H. Hanes. The Board adopted the motion and ordered the buildings torn down at once.

The new City of Winston-Salem was continuing to grow, and still there were things to be worked out in this young City Government. As the City was growing, so were the needs of the people as far as protection from fire.

Tragedy struck the fire department in 1932, when Fire Chief Harry E. Nissen was killed in the discharge of his official duties while he was responding to a fire alarm. His death



Chief L.C. Williams.

resulted from a collision of his car and a bus at the intersection of Cherry and 6th Streets. Chief Nissen had been Fire Chief for over 18 years. The Board appointed Captain W.G. Hobson as the new Chief. Forty-eight years later, tragedy will strike the fire department again; thus resulting in the City making history.

The year is 1950, and the Board of Aldermen have decided to hire its first Negro firemen. Under the urging of Baptist Ministers, spearheaded by Reverend Kenneth Williams, the City will turn the Dunleith Avenue Fire Station into a Negro station, to be operated by Negro personnel. The Community Relations Project by Mayor Marshall Kurfees inaugurated a policy of appointing Negroes on agencies in which Negroes have an interest. The City already employed Negro Police Officers; why not firemen? Approx-

mately 63 Negro men applied for jobs with the Winston-Salem Fire Department. The Board allotted \$4,000 for the care and maintenance of the Dunleith Avenue Fire Station. All of the men were high school graduates and some had college degrees. Lester Edward Ervin, Jr., Robert Lindsay Grier, George Waddell

Penn, John Franklin Meredith, Jr., Willie James Carter, Raphael O'Hara Black, John Henry Ford, and John Roy Thomas were the City's first Negro Fire Company.

The men reported to work on March 1, at 7:30 a.m. at the Dunleith Avenue Fire Station. The trainees will receive a salary of \$192.00 a



Johnson, Cotton Fire, 1955.



Training at First and Bath Streets, 1960.



North Trade Street, 1964.



1962 Fire Engine.



Aftermath of the Rominger Furniture fire

month and will be on probation during their first six months of training.

The Fire Chief, at this time, was M.G. Brown and Lieutenant L.C. Williams was the Training Officer. These eight men ended their six weeks of training with a demonstration of fire-fighting techniques and a written examination. On the written examination, four men made a perfect score, and the average mark on the exam was 93. Captain R.A. Overby was named the top ranking officer at the station. Holding the rank of Sergeants and drivers at the station were T.W. Holcomb; S.T. Ervin; J.A. Cecil, Jr.; E.M. Vestal and H.M. Shields. These white men all volunteered for duty at the station. The new firemen presented Lieutenant L.C. Williams with a wristwatch as a token of appreciation. This occurred on April 16, 1951.

Less than two months later, on June 2, 1951, three of the eight Negro firemen were "baptized" into the world of fire, when the Wood Finishing Products Company, Plant 652, on Waughtown Street went up in flames. John Franklin Meredith, John Roy Thomas, and Lester Edward Ervin, Jr., joined four others of the department to keep flames from burning lacquer from spreading all over the area. The three, emerged from the blaze, very wet and very tired. Captain R.A. Overby praised the men by saying, "they stuck in there like veterans." All of these men have paved the way for others in the department and also showed that black and white personnel can work together.

During 1955, there were two major improvements in fire fighting methods; portable ventilation fans that were used as reserve equipment

were put into active service and placed on the Assistant Chief's car and Aerial Truck. These fans, de-

signed to clear smoke from buildings rapidly, not only saved smoke damage, but also made it possible



B.F. Huntley Furniture fire.



The Gang at Old Number 3.

for firemen to do a better job.

Secondly, smoke masts, Scott Air Pakswere more fully utilized on smoke and gas fires. The protection given by these masks also brought about better fire protection results.

Also introduced was the encouragement of the year-round classroom and drill program because it showed good results on the fireground. The following is a comparison from annual reports in 1955 to annual reports in 1988:

	<u>1955</u>	<u>1988</u>
Total Fire Loss	\$447,621	\$6,805,725
Civilian Fatalities	4	7
Civilian Injuries	6	47
Fires in Buildings	210	496
Total Alarms	1,157	4,586

Also during the 1950s, two new fire stations were constructed. Engine Company #7 is located in the Buena Vista area. This is a two bay station and was constructed in 1951. Engine Company #8 is located near the Wake Forest University area. This station was constructed in 1957.

The 1960s and 1970s were busy for the Winston-Salem Fire Department in terms of growth. This was the most productive years for the fire department. Seven fire stations were constructed during this time. Fire Station #1 was constructed in 1976 and was later renamed after former Fire Chief A.B. Bullard. Fire Station #3 located on N. Liberty Street and Fire Station #9 located on Ogburn Avenue were constructed

in 1964. Fire Stations #5, #10, and #11 were constructed in 1974. Fire Station #12 on New Walkertown Road was constructed in 1977.

As the 1970s closed and the 1980s began, there was both tragedy and history made in the Winston-Salem Fire Department. Fire Chief A.B. Bullard suddenly died of a heart attack and Lester E. Ervin, one of the first black firefighters hired, became the first black fire chief in the State.

The fire department grew even larger with the construction of four new fire stations. Fire Station #4 was relocated from Dunleith Avenue to Martin Luther King Drive. Fire Station #14 located on Shattalon Drive was constructed in 1982. One year later, Fire Station #16 located on Pope Road was constructed. Fire Station #15 located on Shattalon Drive was constructed in 1985.

Chief Ervin retired in 1989 and passed the baton on to our present

Fire Chief, F.E. "Pete" Harless. The fire department has grown even more with the construction of Fire Station #17, which is the home of our Hazardous Materials Team. Fire Station #18 which will be located on York and Peace Haven Roads is under construction.

Today, Chief Harless manages a department comprised of 261 employees. This department covers an area of 98.9 square miles and serves a population of 160,997. The Winston-Salem Fire Department has 17 stations and a maintenance facility. The goal of the department is to protect lives and property, and with that, the Winston-Salem Fire Department is one of the most honored fire departments in the State.



Old Number 1.



Fire Chief L.E. Ervin.

Fire Activity Summary

	Calendar Year <u>1989</u>	Calendar Year <u>1990</u>	Calendar Year <u>1991</u>
Total Fire Loss	\$4,079,723	\$4,582,014	\$4,295,643
Civilian Fatalities	4	7	9
Civilian Injuries	35	33	43
Incidents			
Fire	1,209	1,303	1,230
Over Pressure Rupture	5	3	2
Rescue Calls	116	70	77
Hazardous Condition	1,034	813	730
Service Calls	572	410	447
Good Intent	1,572	1,469	1,619
False Alarms	1,237	1,144	1,140
Other	4	2	7
TOTAL:	5,749	5,214	5,252
Building Fires			
Public Assembly	26	21	26
Education	3	8	11
Institution	12	14	17
Residence	362	336	365
Store & Office	30	31	30
Basic Industry & Manufacturing	35	52	33
Storage	20	25	15
Special Properties	0	0	0
TOTAL:	488	487	497

January 1992