

The Early History of The Spartanburg Fire Department 1832-1966

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**From A Settlement, To A Village, To A Town, To A City
Evolution of Spartanburg's Fire Department
1832-1966**

The story of the Spartanburg Fire Department is one of slow development, but one which, by obligation, must begin with the founding of Spartanburg itself. According to written history, settlers began to make their homes in the upstate of South Carolina when early colonist commenced to move inland from coastal regions and after a treaty was made with the Cherokee Indian Nation in the mid-1700s. We are told the county actually formed in 1785 and acquired its name from the "Spartan Regiment," a local militia unit that fought during the Revolutionary War.

A gifted, but unknown writer said, *"Like all inland towns, Spartanburg grew very slowly. Its trade was local, and no manufactures startled the inhabitants with the buzzing of machinery."* He described the village of Spartanburg as having *"a few stores, blacksmith shops, bar rooms, called groceries in those days, the town hotel and doctor's shop, as they were then called, made up the business part of town."* Edward P. McKissick wrote that in 1825 *"there were 26 houses, including three law offices, one saddler's, one tailor's and three blacksmith's shops. The town had about 800 inhabitants. The growth was very gradual for many years."* Although it is documented that the village of Spartanburg actually was incorporated as a town in 1831, *"the place was incorporated as a city"* in 1880.

McKissick went on to say *"When people began to look on this place as an educational centre, it increased in importance. About 1850, the Reverend Benjamin Wofford, a native of Spartanburg and Methodist preacher, left \$100,000 for the erection of a college here. At the close of the War (Civil War), Spartanburg began to look up as a commercial centre. It soon became one of the best cotton markets in the up-country."*

Additionally, McKissick went on to say that *"Between 1878 and 1882 about twenty-nine large store houses were erected."* Ten years later *"Spartanburg has increased in population, in wealth, in business, in manufactures, in educational facilities, and in fact, in every way and in a marvelous way."* The writer also noted that in 1870 the census of Spartanburg was only 1,080. *"It is now estimated at*

about 7,000. It had increased to 3,300 by the census of 1880, and since then it has multiplied in a marvelous manner."

Over time, when the railroad industry moved in the city, Spartanburg became known as the "Hub City" due to the wheel hub shape formed by the many railroad lines that came in the area. A map of Spartanburg County shows five spokes radiating from the city as a hub. *"There is no county in any of the Southern States which has as many manufacturing enterprises as Spartanburg."* Someone wrote that Spartanburg was defined by the textile industry. Many mills were built between late 1800s and early 1900s, all of which provided economic and social structure to the area.

The "Fire Fiend"...An Ever Present Nuisance From the Beginning

The story of the Spartanburg Fire Department represents an evolution in firefighting which resembles that which was experienced in all villages, towns, and cities in South Carolina as well as the nation. As the colonist moved from the coastal areas of South Carolina seeking to settle more inland regions in the late 1600s, and throughout the next couple of centuries, unwanted fires frequently destroyed the properties of those who came to raise their families and make a living.

In this writer's book, *"A Legacy That Lives On,"* I wrote that *"Settling into new territory must have been grueling and challenging as there were few trails to follow, many creeks and rivers to cross, indigenous people ready to do battle, snakes and wild animals to fight, hot summers and brutal winters, and the never-ending threat of fire."* Nancy Backes, in the book *"Great Fires of America,"* penned the following: *"Americans had for many years helplessly watched their little wooden towns burn and be rebuilt and burn again."*

Prior to the organization of a fire department, it has been said that fire was the "greatest enemy" for a community. From South Carolina's earliest beginnings, devastating fires have taken their toll in injury, death, and ruin of property. Out of necessity, these fires brought attention to the need for creative firefighting methods and ordinances required to prevent and safeguard our citizens from unwanted fire. Fire buckets, wet blankets, ladders, axes, and pine tops were the most common tools used in those early days in an effort and "attempt" to

extinguish a fire. And, even though those primitive methods of extinguishment were not always mentioned in newspaper accounts, the reader can rest assured that citizen volunteers pressed into service readily available contrivances to put out their fires.

In the following pages, this writer's research tells the story of the Spartanburg Fire Department...its struggles and its triumphs. Prior to its founding, newspaper accounts reveal the often, terrible hardships of that early era in the Spartanburg Area caused by unwanted fires.

It is noted that in "A History of Spartanburg County" that *"As the village grew, the hazard of fire provided the council with one of its most important problems. One of the first ordinances passed in 1832 required every householder and storekeeper to have a ladder at least fifteen feet long for use in case of fire. A fire alarm called out every citizen with his bucket."*

The Camden Weekly printed on **July 18, 1854** *"that a fire occurred in Spartanburg on Wednesday last. The fire was extinguished without much damage, but General O. E. Edwards and J. Wofford Tucker, esq. received some injuries, though it is hoped not serious, in their efforts to prevent the spread of the fire."*

On **September 23, 1858** The Yorkville Enquirer made mention that *"We learn from our Spartanburg exchanges that the Carriage Factory of Mr. Jas. A. Fowler, at Spartanburg, was destroyed by fire on Monday night last week."*

The Fayetteville Semi-Weekly told of a fire in their **April 23, 1860** paper of a fire in Spartanburg. *"We had a fire this (Saturday) morning, about 3 o'clock, at the Spartanburg Female College. The Chapel, dining room, and a wooden recitation room, were consumed. Fourteen pianos were also destroyed."*

On **June 25, 1863**, The Charleston Mercury reported *"On the night of the 23d, as a correspondent informs us, the stable of Prof. Falk, of the Female College, Spartanburg, was on fire. A horse and buggy were consumed, and the tools and machinery of J. M. Bost's carpentry establishment. The fire was supposed to be incendiary."*

A very interesting find, "A History of Spartanburg County," compiled by the Spartanburg Unit of the Writer's Program of the Work Projects Administration, South Carolina State Department of Education, published in July of 1940, details a great deal of history about the City of Spartanburg. For example, the commentary affirms *"In 1867 suggestions were offered for a steam fire engine, but in vain. The fire department grew slowly, beginning with a volunteer hook and ladder company in 1873, adding two Negro companies in 1875, and, in 1882, getting the long desired engine. It was named The Spartan."*

The Charleston Daily News told of several *"Incendiary Fires In Spartanburg"* in the **May 3, 1872** paper. *"Within a week past three daring attempts have been made to fire the town. The first attempt was made on last Wednesday night, when an armful of shavings was placed on the plaza of the 'Old Bomar House' and set on fire. On Friday night following another attempt was made to fire the wooden offices in rear of the law office of Evans & Bomar, and on Sunday night the incendiary was caught in the very act of firing the building occupied by Mr. Leonhardt as a barroom. The proof and his own confessions connect him pretty certainly with all three of the efforts to fire the town."*

Records gathered from various resources indicate that **around 1873** in Spartanburg that *"A group of spirited, young men formed the first fire protection organization in town. They believed it was a civic duty and social honor to risk their own life for the safety of the lives and property of their fellow citizens."* There is evidence that each member desiring to join the fire company and wishing to remain a member in good standing, was required to pay 25 cents per month in dues. In some towns and cities if a member was found to be in "arrears" for any period of time, the matter was turned over to a magistrate for collection. Also, if a member failed to live up to the rules and regulations of the fire company, the individual was placed on a "Defaulters' List" and fined an amount of money and subject to expulsion.

The Daily Phoenix of Columbia reported on **March 5, 1874** that *"The dwelling house of Mr. Eber Bearden, of Spartanburg, caught fire and was consumed. Mr. Bearden was absent at the time and nothing was saved."*

The Newberry Weekly Herald printed on **March 5, 1879** that *"The late fire in Spartanburg happened next door to the branch hardware store of our fellow*

townsman, Mr. S. P. Boozer. Luckily for him and others that town has a fire engine and the flames were easily extinguished." The Winnsboro News and Herald also reported on this fire and noted that *"but for the prompt and energetic action of the fire company, the whole block on the north side of the public square, including the courthouse, would have been consumed."* (Writer's note: Prior to 1882, there is evidence that Spartanburg possessed a hand-drawn, hand-pumped engine as well as several hand-drawn hook and ladder companies manned by both white and African-American firemen.)

Traversing the dirt streets of Spartanburg could be difficult at times, especially when heavy rains turned them into mud. Pulling a hand pump or hand-drawn hook and ladder wagon was hard on the volunteers. According to "A History of Spartanburg County," *"For many years the muddy streets and roads occasioned discussion and ridicule. During rainy seasons in winter, traffic was almost suspended. In the seventies (1870s) there were times when men in high-top boots could scarcely make their way across Main Street. Wagons and carriages stuck in the gummy mud and sometimes remained unmoved for two weeks. Tradition persists in perpetuating the story that, during the late seventies, a mule drowned in the 'Red Sea' which was Main Street between Church and Liberty Streets. In 1882 the city was very proud of its one mile of paving."*

The Greenville News, in the **April 2, 1881** edition, noted that *"The large brick building in the campus of Wofford College, occupied by Professor Daniel DuPre, was today destroyed by fire. The Vigilants and hook and ladder, with a large number of citizens, promptly responded to the alarm of the fire bell at half past 1 p.m., but too late to stay the flames."*

The Charlotte Observer noted on **January 15, 1882** that *"Spartanburg has a steam fire engine, and the people are talking about erecting water works, having a street railroad and macadamizing (paving) the streets."* (Writer's note: The steam fire engine was now pulled by horses because the weight of the engine was too great to be pulled by the volunteers.)

According to "A History of Spartanburg County," in **May of 1882**, *"Moses Greenwald was elected captain, and B. B. Bishop was elected secretary and treasurer of the Spartan Fire Engine Company, a group of public-spirited young men who paid dues of twenty-five cents a month for the privilege of risking their*

lives to save the lives and property of their fellow-citizens. B. B. Bishop furnished the following roster of the original company, of which he was the last surviving member: E. M. Anderson, G. G. Avant, R. Bain, Jr., S. J. Bivings, J. A. Blowers, R. E. Brewton, B. B. Bishop, A. S. Cheek, T. E. Evins, W. M. Floyd, Mose Greenwald, William A. Law, B. M. Lee, C. H. Lenser, J. H. Land, J. M. Nicholls, D. T. Pope, O. S. Roberts, R. A. Roberson, J. K. Stuckey, C. R. Smith, P. J. O. Smith, J. T. Thompson, J. E. Vernon."

The article continues, "Old time members of the early fire companies recall, with chuckles, that membership in them was a social and civic honor, and their members paid dues and supplied themselves with black breeches and boots and red shirts worn for drills and parades. The city furnished regulation firemen's helmets. The chief was paid \$100 a year, in 1886, and his assistant 450. After ten years there were three paid firemen, who lived in the reel house and received \$30 a month each. At that time the fire station was a two-room, dirt-floor frame building, and the chief duties of the paid men were to care for the horses and equipment. Not until after the World War were the volunteer companies disbanded and the department organized on a salaried basis. On June 16, 1916, Spartanburg entertained the State Firemen's Convention consisting of 200 delegates. By that time Spartanburg had a motor truck; a hook and ladder apparatus, drawn by two horses; and two hose wagons, each with three horses. The first motor truck was bought in 1912, and the horses were given up entirely in 1923."

In the **May 25, 1882** edition of The Charlotte Observer, the writer noted that *"The Spartans, of Spartanburg, one of the fire companies that helped us in our late celebration, seem to have had a splendid time while in our city. On their return home they had a meeting, at which time they adopted a resolution highly complimentary to the citizens and firemen of Charlotte, quite in contrast to the report of the Greenville boys."*

On **August 10, 1882**, The Yorkville Enquirer reported that *"A fire in Spartanburg last Saturday destroyed the interior of a two story brick building, belonging to Simpson Bobo. The building was used as a bakery. Loss between \$2,000 and \$3,000. Note: Forty years later Mr. Bobo suffered still another significant fire loss (see article of Oct. 14, 1922).*

“The Piedmont House, at Spartanburg, S. C., was burned today. The loss is covered by \$7,000 insurance,” according to The Knoxville Daily Chronicle on **December 9, 1882**.

The Atlanta Constitution made note on the same fire on **December 10, 1882** that *“At one o’clock Thursday, the Piedmont seminary of this city, a large three story wooden building, was discovered to be on fire. The flames were first seen bursting from the roof over one of the rooms of the third story, in which room there was a defective stove pipe, supposed to have been the cause of the fire. The flames raged steadily for three hours, reducing the whole structure to the ground. The fire engine was promptly on hand but could do little.”*

On **May 21, 1884**, The Charlotte Observer described an occasion of celebration in the “Queen City” having a large attendance with entertainment, speeches, a parade, and competitions. During the parade, dignitaries were first, then the military and finally the firemen. *“The Howard Relief, of Wilmington, with their engine and reel, headed by the Cornet Concert Club, were in the lead, and following came The Palmetto engine (Columbia), Pioneer Hook and Ladder (Greenville), Hornet engine and reel (Charlotte), Spartan engine and reel (Spartanburg), Pioneer, Jr., engine and reel (Charlotte), and Independent Hook and Ladder (Charlotte).* The lengthy article further describes the procession *“Was fully a mile long. The handsome uniforms of the companies, the dazzling engines and beautiful trucks and reels made the procession an unusually imposing one.”* The writer also noted that *“The Spartan steamer was the handsomest in the procession.”*

This writer examined the Sanborn Map of Spartanburg dated **June 1884** and found the following information: The population of the city was about 4,000; the fire department consisted of one steam fire engine and two hand engines. The city utilized at least seven, 12,000 gallon cisterns located throughout the town square for water supply. (Writer’s Note: Sanborn maps are detailed maps of U. S. cities and towns in the 19th and 20th centuries. The maps were created to allow fire insurance companies to assess their total liability in urbanized areas much like ISO does today. The maps were prepared and published by The Sanborn Map Company and are very useful for history research.)

The Atlanta Constitution, on **June 4, 1885**, reported that *“The fire department of Greenville is completing arrangements for a tournament to be given on the 24th and 25th of this month. The firemen of Charlotte, Columbia, Spartanburg, Anderson, Newberry, Laurens, Darlington and Florence are expected to be here and enter the contests for the prizes which will be offered.”*

The Anderson Intelligencer, dated **April 2, 1885**, notes the following announcement: *“The Greenville News says there will be a big excursion from Newberry and other points on the C.&G.R.R. to that city on the 1st of May, and as the annual parade of the Greenville Fire Department comes off about that time, there is talk of arranging a friendly contest between the firemen of that city and those of Anderson, Newberry and Spartanburg. Our firemen are green hands, but we have no doubt the Company would visit our neighbor on the occasion, even if did not take part in the contest. The trip would be a pleasant one.”*

The Union Times on **January 15, 1886** told of a difficult fire to extinguish in Spartanburg. *“About 1 o’clock Saturday morning, the fire bell at this place rang out, calling for aid and assistance from our firemen and citizens generally. The night being very cold and the ground covered with snow few responded to the summons with first call, but an additional ring brought a crowd to the scene of the conflagration. Upon arriving upon the ground we found the whole square illuminated and the dwelling house of Dr. C. Lee, which stood 25 yards from the City Hall, wrapped in a sheet of flames. The steamer was at her post as soon as a force sufficient to manage her arrived, and began to throw a stream of water in about fifteen minutes, but the flames had already gained such headway that it could do nothing but keep the fire from spreading.”*

The writer continues, *“The night being intensely cold the water in the valves froze, and the fire in the engine had to be put out. Then the little hand engine began to play, and right nobly did our colored firemen work.”*

On **August 31, 1886** around 9:50 P. M., a very strong earthquake struck the Southeastern United States. In Charleston many buildings were destroyed and fires spread over the city. Nearly sixty deaths occurred in the Holy City. In the meantime, almost a month later on **September 24, 1886**, several large aftershocks were felt over South Carolina. The Union Times reported this story: *“We had about settled down under the pleasant conviction that we had felt the*

last shock of the earthquake, when on Monday night, about 10 o'clock, the unpleasant visitor again made us sensible of its presence by another shock. During the night, from six to eight tremors were felt, and again, about 5 o'clock Tuesday morning, a shock nearly as severe as the second one made houses and furniture tremble very perceptibly.

On **January 16, 1887**, The Charlotte Observer described Spartanburg as having a population of about 4,000. It tells that *"The city hall is a fine structure and presents a noble appearance. The ground floor is occupied by the guard house, the council chamber and the Spartanburg Fire Engine Company."*

Again, this writer studied The Sanborn Map of Spartanburg published in **January 1888** and uncovered the following information: The population of Spartanburg was listed at 3,900. The fire department operated with one steam engine and one hand engine. Water system constructed in 1888.

The Yorkville Enquirer announced on **April 23, 1890** that *"Spartanburg now has the electric light, which was turned on for the first time last Friday night."*

From The News and Courier dated **July 28, 1890**, a publication, written by Edward P. McKissick, *"A Story of Spartan Push...The Greatest Cotton Manufacturing Centre In The South...Spartanburg, South Carolina, And Its Resources,"* describes the fire department in clear detail on pages 3 and 4. *"The fire department is one of the best in the South and perhaps the most unique. Since the establishment of the water-works the splendid steam fire engine has been laid aside and the department now uses the hydrants. The height of the standpipe is such that a hose attached to the hydrant in the city square, or in any other portion of the city, will throw water with sufficient force to enable the city to dispense with the expense of keeping up the steam fire engine. The chief of the department is Mr. M. (Moses) Greenwald, and the assistant chief is Capt. R. E. Brewton. Both are expert firemen. Under them there are four white companies, two colored companies and one colored hook and ladder company. The captains of the white fire companies are as follows: Robert Holt, T. A. Caldwell, J. T. Boyd and Moses Greenwald. The department is very efficient and always responds promptly when a fire occurs."* (Note: According to The Insurance Year Book For 1891, the fire chief of Spartanburg was referred to as "Chief Engineer.")

In the same publication, it describes the fire department headquarters as follows: *“The Opera House is situated in the City Hall and is in the central portion of the city. The City Hall is a very neat and attractive building, and one of which the city has reason to be proud. The clock in the steeple is of invaluable service to the city. The council chamber and the police headquarters are both within the City Hall and the guard house is in the rear end of the building. The fire department headquarters are also in the City Hall, and in fact it is the headquarters for nearly all the property of the city. The building is constructed of brick, the color is penciled red and contrasts very strikingly with the Merchants’ Hotel, which is but a few feet off.*

The Insurance Year Book For **1891**, Fire Protection & Water Supply section, states The population of the city was 6,000; fire area radius 1 ½ miles; mercantile buildings, brick, 2 and 3 stories; private, wood, 1 and 2 stories; wooden roofs permitted. Fire department-1 steam fire engine, not used, 1 hook and ladder truck, 4 hose carriages; Siamese couplings used; hose cotton good 1000 ft., rubber 500 ft.; value of fire department \$4000; total membership 60, volunteers; bell alarm. Chief Engineer, M. Greenwald. WATER SUPPLY-Source, Chincapin creek and Cleveland branch; system, pumping to standpipe; standpipe cap 216,000 gals; 2 Deane pumping engines, dy cap 2,000,000 gals.; 60 hydrants, Chapman; pipe 7 miles 4 to 10 in dia.; 25 gates; 2 meters, Crown; pressure 50 pounds. City clerk, Jos. M. Elford. (Note: As today, there are always some discrepancies in reporting, ie. this document vs. The Sanborn Maps.

The Watchman and Southron paper of Sumter, noted on **June 1, 1892** that *“Mr. E. M. Anderson, formerly of this place has been elected engineer of the Spartanburg city fire department.”*

Still again, this writer sought information from The Sanborn Maps dated **December 1893** and came across more intelligence about Spartanburg’s fire protection: The fire department had 165 members who manned one steamer (mfg. by American LaFrance), one hook and ladder truck, seven hose carts with reels of 400 ft. of hose each. The city had ten miles of water pipes (12”, 10”, 8”, 6”, and 4”) along with 103 dbl. hydrants.

The Sanborn Maps published in **March 1898** revealed the city’s population had risen to about 12,000 people. The fire department had 144 members who

operated with one LaFrance steamer (*"has not been tried for 7 years"*), one hook and ladder truck (*"too heavy for practical purposes"*), 3,000 ft. of hose carried on seven hose carts. *"Council have decided to have 1 hose wagon with hand chem'ls, 1 or 2 horses, paid driver & 1,000 ft. add'l hose. Present fire dep't not good."*

The Sumter newspaper, The Watchman and Southron, announced in their **June 18, 1902** paper that the railroad people are offering *"Cheap Railroad Rates for the Firemen's Tournament"* to be held in Sumter *"which is the lowest ever granted for any similar event. For firemen in uniform the following round trip rates have been announced: Spartanburg \$3.00. Such cheap rates are well calculated to catch the crowd."* The reported also noted that *"Anderson, Greenville, Spartanburg, Camden, Columbia, Charleston, Sumter and Florence all will be there with their beautiful horses and wagons."*

According to The Sanborn Maps, in **September 1902**, city fire department had still had 144 members, three of whom were paid. One LaFrance steamer, six hose reels, one hose wagon with hand chemicals, 3,000 ft. of good hose, one hook and ladder and two horses. The water works had installed 130 dbl. hydrants having average distance of 500 ft.

The State noted on **August 30, 1903** that *"This morning about 4 o'clock the grocery store of Mr. J. H. Millster, along with a stock of goods, located on South Church street, was totally destroyed by fire. The origin of the fire is not known. The loss is estimated at \$2,500."*

The Yorkville Enquirer, published on **February 5, 1904**, told a sad story. *"A box car containing ninety-six bales of cotton shipped from Meridian, Miss., to Modena Cotton Mills here, was discovered to be on fire when the train reached Spartanburg Tuesday morning. The fire was soon extinguished by the Spartanburg fire department, but quite a good deal of cotton was damaged. When the car was emptied Friday at Spartanburg the dead body of an unknown man was found wedged between the bales, his death having been caused by suffocation. There was nothing on his body by which his identity could be established. It is presumed that the fire was caused in some way by this man."*

The Greensboro Patriot shared a story on **March 16, 1904** about a tragic accident with a fire engine and a locomotive. *"While responding to an alarm of fire tonight*

*two valuable horses attached to the fire engine were instantly killed at Main Street crossing by a collision with passenger train No. 10, bound for Columbia. The horses were going at a furious speed and the driver was wholly unaware of the train's approach and was unable to stop in time to prevent the accident. On **March 23, 1904**, The Anderson Intelligencer reported briefly on the tragedy which hit the fire department..."The hose wagon and team of the Spartanburg fire department collided with a train on the Southern at the main street crossing and both horses were killed."*

The Spartanburg Fire Department was summoned to the Town of Union to help with a major fire raging there, according to The Gaffney Ledger of **January 27, 1905**. *"News was received here over the wires Wednesday afternoon that 'Union was on fire.' Mr. Emslie Nicholson, president of the Excelsior mills, summoned the fire department of the mills, which did excellent work in preventing the spreading of the flames. In fact all of the cotton mills contributed their fire fighters and hose and at the request of the mayor the Spartanburg fire company and engine were sent down on a special. The 25 men had a terribly cold ride on a flat car, many of them without overcoats while their hats were blown off. Having no side track for the passenger train they did not reach the city until 4:45. The fire was then under control but the Union department was so worn out that their presence and assistance were very acceptable. All the people of Union heartily appreciate their promptness in coming to the town's aid when it seemed that the whole eastern portion was threatened."*

On **February 14, 1905**, The Chattanooga News reported *"Fire was discovered in the roof of the American Bank. It had made considerable headway when discovered. The roof and furniture were destroyed."*

The Spartanburg Journal described on **September 6, 1906** the water system in use at the time which was built in 1888. *"One of the prime factors in the permanent growth and development of a city, is the water supply. The city is supplied with about 20 miles of mains, reaching all the business and residence sections. There are 137 public hydrants and many private hydrants for fire protection. There are 1,000 services and 7 public drinking fountains. The standpipe, erected on North Church Street is 92 feet high and has a capacity of 2,160,000 gallons. The water pressure at the office of the company on South Church Street is 60 pounds, which can be instantly increased to 90. This is sufficient for fire protection allowing a*

stream of water to be thrown over the tallest building in the city in all but the most elevated sections. The fire engine is rarely ever needed to reach the fires, the hose team in ninety out of a hundred cases doing the work effectively, by direct connection with the hydrants."

According to the Yorkville Enquirer dated **September 25, 1906**, "Mr. Logan Gaffney of the Spartanburg fire department, had a narrow escape from suffocation at a fire last Friday. He fell behind some boxes in a burning building and was discovered only in the nick of time to save his life."

A Newberry newspaper, The Herald and News, reported on **February 19, 1907** on a large fire in Greenville which involved the Spartanburg Fire Department. "Fire in Greenville on Thursday night completely gutted on portion of the Conyers building, located on Washington street in the heart of the business district. The firemen had a terrific fight, and at one time the whole block, the most valuable in the business district, was threatened. So grave was the situation that Mayor Mahon called upon Spartanburg to hold her fire department in readiness to be dispatched to Greenville on a special train which was quickly furnished by the Southern. Anderson was asked to make ready for similar service, but outside help was not needed."

The Wilmington, North Carolina, newspaper, The Semi-Weekly Messenger, dated **March 29, 1907**, said "Fire which started this morning at 11 o'clock destroyed sixty houses and left 325 people homeless, causing a loss of about \$75,000. Many of the houses destroyed were the property of P. L. Shipp. It is said that about \$50,000 insurance was carried on the buildings. There were no fatalities, but several people were painfully hurt by being hit with bricks from the falling walls. The fire started in the house occupied by J. M. Carver, on Forest Street, originating, it is thought from a defective flue. The fire department, on reaching the scene found that the nearest hydrant was 500 feet away and by the time hose was connected the fire had gained such headway that the houses could not be saved. The fire destroyed houses on Arch Street and several adjacent streets. A fire engine which has not been used for years was brought into requisition and it was by this means that the firemen finally gained control."

The Herald of Rock Hill noted on **May 1, 1907** that "An agreement has been reached between the city and the Home Water Supply company whereby the

Company's plant is to be acquired for a sum in the neighborhood of \$200,000. The city will probably take over the system for operation about July 1. About \$75,000 will be spent in extending and improving the system to give the city desired fire protection."

In the **March 12, 1908** edition of The Bamberg Herald, a reporter noted that *"The Spartanburg fire department has had a day's battle with flames that are slowly consuming hundreds of bales of cotton stored in warehouse No. 1 at the Spartan Mill in this city and tonight the fire, though under control, is still burning in a hundred or more bales that have been rolled into the open.*

The fire was discovered this morning about 10 o'clock burning in the centre of the warehouse which contained more than a thousand bales. The fire department responded promptly and found the only practical way of reaching the fire was through an opening made in the roof of the building. Opening was made at several places and streams of water poured into the smoking column. The smoke that issued from the building was terrible in its effects upon the firemen and Chief Kennedy, with two of his men, James Ellisor and John Ross, were overcome and had to be carried from the scene. The chief and Ross recovered sufficiently to resume the fight, but Ellisor is at home under the care of a physician tonight. Just a year ago the Spartan Mill village was destroyed by fire, entailing a loss exceeding \$60,000."

By **1908**, The Sanborn Maps revealed marked improvements in Spartanburg's fire protection. The department had thirteen paid firemen including the chief; the men sleep in engine house; one LaFrance steam fire engine; one three-horse hose wagon, which carries 1,000 ft. of 2½" hose and 50 gal. chemical tan with 200 ft. small chemical hose; two, two-horse wagons which carry 1,000 ft. of 2 ½" hose and two chemical extinguishers each. Five hose reels in reserve, 7,000 ft. 2 ½" hose in good condition; five horses; to have additional by June 1, 1908; one hook and ladder truck also two horses and six men; fire alarm by telephone sounded by bell on Court House. The water works now utilized 25 miles of water pipe and 145 dbl. hydrants. The population of Spartanburg was now at 17,000 people.

On **June 4, 1908**, The Evening Index of Greenwood announced that *"The Spartanburg fire department bought a new hook and ladder truck. It cost \$1,500 and will be pulled by two horses."*

Strangely, The Miami Morning News-Record reported on **July 16, 1908** that *“Fire yesterday afternoon destroyed two large stores in the Spartan Mill village, burning out a beef market, destroyed three houses owned by the Spartan Mills Company and a number of out-houses, entailing a loss of about \$15,000, which is covered by insurance.”*

The Charlotte Observer noted on **January 26, 1909** that *“The city council of Spartanburg will probably let a contract for the installation of a Gamewell fire alarm system within the next few weeks. At a meeting of the council this afternoon the Gamewell system was discussed, and a representative appeared before council and gave an estimate of the cost and explained the workings of the system. The matter was reported favorably and referred to the contract committee with power to act.”* City records indicate that thirty-five alarm boxes were purchased and installed throughout the city proper.

The Herald News of Newberry reported in the **March 16, 1909** printing of the paper that *“C. P. Moseley, a member of the freshman class of Wofford college, was caught under a falling wall in the rear of a burned building and badly injured. In an unconscious condition he was removed to the Spartanburg Hospital and given every attention. The extent of his injuries could not be stated tonight. Moseley was standing in the rear of the building watching the firemen fight the flames, when suddenly the rear walls fell and the young student was caught under the brick and mortar. His parents at Laurens have been notified.”*

The Bamberg Herald on **March 18, 1909** expounded more on the above fire. *“...half of the Cleveland building, at East Main and South Church streets was completely gutted and other portions of it considerably damaged. In the course of the fire five firemen and one Wofford College student were injured by falling walls. The injured: W. D. Mitchell, assistant chief, arm and hand mashed; C. L. Stevens, scalp wound; Sam Wyatt, left arm crushed; James Elder, head cut; D. L. Varner, left hand burned. This is the greatest fire loss Spartanburg has sustained in many years.”*

On **April 27, 1910**, The Greenwood Daily Journal informed its readers that *“Fire at 3:30 o’clock Friday morning destroyed an entire block on Morgan Square, in the heart of the business section, entailing a loss of \$75,000, with little insurance. The*

Spartan Inn, one of the principal hotels of the city, was among the buildings burned. Then number also included several important retail stores. The origin of the fire is unknown. There was no loss of life.” The Brevard News reported that *“There were about 100 guests in the building at the time of the fire, but all escaped.”*

According to The Times and Democrat in their **December 1, 1910** issue of the paper, *“A member of the Spartanburg fire department must gain several pounds of flesh within the next two weeks or resign his position, according to a ruling handed down by city council Monday afternoon. The minimum weight of a fireman in Spartanburg is 150 pounds and this man weights 148.”* The Greenville News made further comments about this situation....*“The business of playing checkers 16 hours a day is hard work.”*

The Journal and Tribune, a Knoxville, Tennessee paper, reported on **February 22, 1911**, that *“Because the chief of the fire department bathes his bull pups in the tub set apart by the city for his men, there is a lively row in the local fire department which will demand speedy adjudication of some sort to prevent an open breach between the chief and his men. Members of the department, alleging that the city council asking that they be removed. Another charge lodged against the chief is that while enroute to a fire the wagon has been stopped to pick up a bull pup, thus losing much valuable time.”* The caption in The Tampa Tribune on same day read, *“Men Do Not Like To Dip After Two Pups.”* On a positive note, the paper did say that *“Fire Chief Kennedy is one of the best ‘extinguishers’ in South Carolina.”*

The Fort Mill Times on **June 1, 1911** reported that *“Fire of unknown origin completely destroyed eight frame houses on Ridge and Vernon streets, near Spartan Mills, in an unusually short time. The total loss is about \$4,000.”*

An interesting story was covered by The Evening Chronicle, a Charlotte newspaper, on **June 29, 1911**. *“The sight of an ice wagon on fire, the driver running through the street yelling ‘fire!’ attracted a large crowd of citizens to the vicinity of Kennedy place and North Church street, where W. B. Hallett’s automobile truck, used for delivering ice, was on fire. Some rushed to the call box at the corner of Church and Main and turned in an alarm. The department dashed up, and just as the firemen made ready to play a stream of water on the burning ice wagon the flames went out of their own accord. There have been all kinds of*

fires in Spartanburg and from all sorts of causes, but an ice wagon has never before been known to catch fire. It was a novel and unusual sight."

The **September 1912** printing of The Sanborn Maps reveal even more improvements in the city's fire protection. Spartanburg's population was now at 18,000. The water works had expanded to 37 miles of water pipes with 207 dbl. hydrants. The fire department had fourteen paid firemen, including the chief, and fifteen volunteers; four horses, drop harness; one LaFrance steam fire engine; one three-horse hose wagon with 1,000 ft. of 2 ½" hose, 50 gal. chemical tank, and 200 ft. of chemical hose; two, two-horse hose wagons with 1,000 ft. of 2 ½" hose and two chemical extinguishers on each; one hose reel located on Farley Av.; 6,000 ft. of 2 ½" hose in good condition; one (C-grade) truck; Gamewell fire alarm system, 32 boxes.

The Asheville Citizens-Times covered a big story about the upstate in the **January 2, 1913** edition of the paper. *"An earthquake of sufficient violence to cause a number of chimneys to topple over was felt throughout the Piedmont section of South Carolina at 1:30 o'clock this afternoon. The trembling of the earth continued for five or six seconds and caused people to run out of their houses in alarm. In the open country a low rumbling noise was heard."*

Old records from the American LaFrance Fire Engine Company (compliments of Ray Bennett of Charleston) reveals that Spartanburg ordered a Type 12 triple combination pumper which was shipped **June 20, 1913**. Triple combination indicates the truck had a pump, carried a compliment of fire hose and ladders. This engine did not carry a water tank but rather utilized a chemical tank (large soda/acid type). This was the city's first motorized fire engine. City records reveal the new engine was placed in service at the central station. (Writer's Note: The American LaFrance Company was one of the oldest fire apparatus manufacturers in the country with roots dating back to 1832.)

On **November 21, 1913**, a story was covered in The Yorkville Enquirer about the York County Sunday School Convention. Miss Grace Vandiver reported *"an interesting circumstance in connection with this work (Sunday School) in Spartanburg. Recognizing that the firemen could not come out to Sunday School, Rev. W. A. McAulay, pastor of the Associate Reformed Church, established a home class at the engine house and went there to teach it. The firemen became very*

much interested and when the state convention was held, they were anxious to march in the (Sunday School) parade; but there was objection because of the possibility of a fire alarm, and the difficulty was finally overcome by allowing the firemen to take their engines, hose reels, ladders, etc.”

The Greenville News announced in their **April 24, 1915** printing that *“Firemen To Meet At Greenwood.”* The article continued, *“Greenwood is making preparations to entertain several thousand visitors during the State Firemen’s Tournament which will be held in this city May 18th, 19th and 20th.”* This writer notices that Mr. S. J. Nicholls, *“a prominent attorney of Spartanburg”* was to speak at this meeting along with F. H. McMaster, State Insurance Commissioner for South Carolina. There is sufficient evidence available to suggest that Mr. Nicholls may have served the Firemen’s Association as their attorney for several years.

The **May 7, 1915** edition of The Greenville News told that *“The Dean Street Public School building was damaged by fire here today to the extent of \$8,000. The loss is fully covered by insurance. The flames which broke out shortly after 8 o’clock this morning, are believed to have had their origin in the basement of the structure. The cause of the fire is unknown, but is supposed to have been started by some one who had spent the night in the building.”*

The Greenville News noted on **June 2, 1915** that *“Though there was no fire in Spartanburg last night neither the firemen nor the fire horses got hardly a wink of sleep. Through a mishap to the fire alarm system, which occurred shortly after midnight, the fire alarm was sounded at intervals of considerable regularity for more than two hours and every time the alarm was turned in the fire horses broke from their stalls and ran under the harness. As often the firemen placed them back in their stalls only to have them bolt again in a few moments when the gong sounded and the chains were dropped by the electrical apparatus. Fully 25 times this performance was repeated. It was a strenuous night at headquarters.”*

The Yorkville Enquirer reported on a fireman’s death in the **July 23, 1915** edition of their paper. *“J. W. Elder, a member of the Spartanburg fire department, was probably fatally injured Tuesday afternoon when he fell from the second story of the fire department’s quarters to the ground, sustaining injuries to his back.”*

Note: Further research reveals that fireman Elder did not succumb to his injuries but made significant recovery and pursued another career.

“A \$40,000 Fire At Spartanburg” was noted in the **December 23, 1915** edition of The Pickens Sentinel. *“Fire here destroyed the stock of the Red Iron Racket store and completely gutted the storeroom occupied by the firm on Morgan Square two doors west of the Chapman building.”*

According to The Watchman and Southron newspaper of Sumter, dated **June 24, 1916**, *“Spartanburg was selected as the place of meeting in 1917 by the South Carolina Firemen’s Association here tonight (held in Sumter). “Chief Louis Behrens was re-elected president of the Association. Assistant Chief H. D. Hunsenger, Spartanburg; Chief S. L. Huggins, Manning; Chief C. D. Beaudrot, Greenwood”* were appointed to the Credentials Committee.

A Hendersonville paper, The French Broad Hustler, wrote an article on **August 17, 1916**, about a fire in Inman. *“Fire, supposed to have been caused by a defective flue, at Inman, S. C., early Sunday morning, destroyed property with a valuation estimated at \$5,000. With the help of five members of the Spartanburg Fire Department, volunteer fire fighters prevented a serious conflagration. A call was sent to Spartanburg and Assistant Chief Huntsinger, J. W. Elder, R. O. Cannon, F. E. Kerr and W. J. Warlick rushed to the relief in an automobile. They carried some chemical equipment and the fire was gotten under control in about an hour and a half.”*

On **May 18, 1917**, The Herald News of Newberry shared this local news: *“At the State firemen’s tournament in Spartanburg Wednesday, Newberry came within a hair’s breath of winning first prize in the race, having lost it by ‘the skin of her teeth’.”* Then, The County Record, a Kingstree paper, printed on **May 24, 1917** that *“Kingstree’s fire ladies returned from Spartanburg delighted with the State Firemen’s convention and justly proud of having won the \$50 prize.”*

A Connecticut newspaper, Hartford Courant, reported on **December 18, 1918** that *“The plant of the Spartanburg ‘Herald’ and Spartanburg ‘Journal’ was destroyed by fire tonight, the loss being estimated at \$200,000.”*

An article found in the **February 11, 1919** edition of The Greenville News tells a sad story about a daughter’s heroic death trying to save her father. *“Two outstanding developments appeared in the investigating today of the fire which*

on Sunday morning at an early hour destroyed the three-story brick building on South Liberty street, causing the death of Perry Burnett and his daughter, Miss Lila Burnett. The first was that Mr. Burnett had been a suffer of heart failure for a number of years. It is believed that while the father and daughter had ample time to escape from the burning building, Mr. Burnett suffered an attack of the heart, and Miss Burnett, in vain efforts to bring her father to safety, sacrificed her own life.

The article continues....*"The second point was that the building had on February 5, 1917, been condemned by city building Inspector J. H. Shores, and that T. B. Ross, owner of the building, had been summoned to appear in police court on two occasions on charges of violating the fire ordinance and the violating of provisions of the building code. Also, the commentary said that "Three members of the fire department, Assistant Chief D. H. Huntsinger, Firemen H. O. Cannon and B. V. Varner, had a narrow escape from death during Sunday's fire. The three firemen were in the dwelling of S. C. Sander, adjacent to the Ross building but a moment before the east wall of the Ross building fell on the Sanders dwelling, demolishing one side of the building completely. The men would have been buried in the ruins had they remained there longer."*

The Gaffney Ledger, printed on **May 3, 1919** that *"Mrs. J. N. Carter, who resides at 184 Humphreys street had a narrow escape from death this morning, when the dwelling occupied by her and her family was totally destroyed by fire. Mrs. Carter arose early this morning and prepared breakfast for her husband. After he left for his duties she returned to her room and fell asleep. About 7 o'clock a neighbor discovered the dwelling to be in flames and an alarm was immediately sent in. By the time the firemen arrived the building was badly damaged and it was evident that it could not be saved. The firemen did their best to save the dwelling and while working on the burning structure learned that Mrs. Carter was asleep. Breaking in the door of her room members of the department awoke her and removed her from the dwelling just in time to prevent her being caught by the falling roof."*

The Greenville News printed a story in the **February 11, 1919** edition of the paper that told a sad tale of neglect and lack of code enforcement. "Two outstanding developments appeared in the investigating today of the fire which on Sunday

morning at an early hour destroyed the three-story brick building on South Liberty street, causing the death of Perry Burnett and his daughter, Miss Lila Burnett.”

“The first was that Mr. Burnett had been a suffer of heart failure for a number of years. It is believed that while the father and daughter had ample time to escape from the burning building, Mr. Burnett suffered an attack of the heart, and Miss Burnett, in vain efforts to bring her father to safety, sacrificed her own life.” The article continues, *“The second point was that the building had on February 5, 1917, been condemned by city building Inspector J. H. Shores, and that T. B. Ross, owner of the building, had been summoned to appear in police court on two occasions on charges of violating the fire ordinance and the violating of provisions of the building code. On one of these occasions Mr. Ross was acquitted, while on the other occasion no disposition was made of his case so are as the records show. Chief W. D. Mitchell, of the fire department, today declared that the burned building was a dangerous place and unsafe for occupancy. Three members of the fire department, Assistant Chief D. H. Hunnsinger, and Firemen H. O. Cannon and B. V. Varner, had a narrow escape from death during Sunday’s fire. The three firemen were in the dwelling of S. C. Sanders, adjacent to the Ross building but a moment before the east wall of the Ross building fell on the Sanders dwelling, demolishing one side of the building completely. The men would have been buried in the ruins had they remained there longer.”*

The Watchman and Southron, a Sumter newspaper, reported on **July 12, 1919** that a significant storm passed through the county several days earlier.

“Spartanburg county was visited shortly after 8 o’clock this morning by one of the most terrible electrical storms ever experienced in this section. The Spartanburg fire department had five alarms in less than thirty minutes. Officials of the Southern Bell Telephone here report their lines suffered not only in the city but throughout the county. In one portion of Spartanburg the rainfall was so heavy that the brick street pavement was undermined and the entire street caved in.”

On **October 14, 1922**, The Greenville News reported that *“One of Spartanburg’s oldest landmarks was almost obliterated this morning when fire practically destroyed the old Simpson Bobo residence on Magnolia Street. The house was built by John S. Rowland and was sold in 1839 to Simpson Bobo when it became the center of social activity here. During the march of Sherman to the sea the*

house was occupied by General Palmer, one of Sherman's cavalry commanders. Of late years it has been used as a boarding house."

The Union Daily Times provided an article in the **December 9, 1922** edition of the paper about an expanding water system. *"The modern water and fire protection system at the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind at Cedar Springs was completed yesterday, the work being supervised by R. A. Jeffries, for many years engineer of the Spartanburg water works plant. In installing the new system at Cedar Springs the hydrants, valves, etc. are so arranged as to be interchangeable with the fire fighting machinery and appliances of the Spartanburg fire department; so that in case of an emergency the Spartanburg firemen could render effective service in fighting fire at the state institution."*

"Two Department Stores Damaged \$75,000," read the headlines of The Watchman and Southron newspaper of **December 16, 1922**. *"Fire originating in the cook stove of the Y.W.C.A. cafeteria, over the Hobbs-Henderson department store on east Main street, broke out at 12:45 a.m. today and before it was brought under control at 2:05 had done estimated damage of \$75,000 to goods in the Hobbs-Henderson company, the Efird Department store, the Kress Five and Ten Cent store and the Woolworth Five and Ten Cent store. The damage was confined to water and smoke in the stores."*

The story of the above fire as appeared in The Union Daily Times of **December 12, 1922** provides more details of interest. *"The firemen were successful in combating the flames on the second floor and proceeded to the third only to be turned back by dense volumes of smoke. Gas masks were brought into play, but by this time a new blaze had started up on the second floor. Horses attached to the horse drawn apparatus of the fire department ran away just as the firemen were leaving the scene and dashed into the Morgan monument a block away. Both were injured severely. It is believed that they will have to be shot."*

The Yorkviller Enquirer printed a lengthy story in the **February 17, 1922** edition of the paper about the renowned and powerful evangelist, Billy Sunday, who was winding up several weeks of revival in Spartanburg. Newspaper accounts reveal that Billy Sunday often conducted revivals in Spartanburg and made it known that the City was one of his favorite locations for meetings. Interestingly, Assistant Fire Chief W. O. Blackwell became very close friends with the evangelist over

time, and during each visit, Billy Sunday spent time with Chief Blackwell and always made sure he stopped by the central station for a photo session with his friend and the firemen. *“The ‘City of Success’ will be a deserted town comparatively next week since Billy Sunday will conclude his meeting here Sunday night and will leave immediately for his home in Winona Lake, Ind. However, he will stop in Washington long enough to call on President Harding, having already made an appointment.”*

The article continues by saying *“Spartanburg would like very much to have Mr. and Mrs. Sunday make this city their home and if they would only intimate that they would live here, the citizens would buy one of the finest houses in the city in a jiffy. There is no question of the fact that Mr. Sunday is mighty well pleased with Spartanburg. He has state several times during his meeting here that this is one of the most hospitable communities that he has ever preached in.”*

Records belonging to the city and confirmed by the archives of the American LaFrance Company, reveal two additional motorized fire engines were purchased in **1923**. One engine was a triple combination pumper and the other was a smaller 4-cylinder chemical engine. The total costs amounted to around \$20,000. The increase of motorized apparatus to the fire department led to the retirement of the horses, steam engine, and hose wagons about this same time.

“Cow Rescued From Well By Floating Her To Top,” read the headline from the **May 15, 1924** printing of The Gaffney Ledger. *“A cow belonging to Andrew Williams, who lives near the end of Pine Street, was floated to freedom with water from the city fire lines last Monday afternoon. The animal had fallen into an abandoned well some 20 feet deep while trying to break through a fence to reach her young calf.”*

The Knoxville Journal and Tribune reported on **October 5, 1924** that *“After burning 27 hours, fire which broke out yesterday morning at 7 o’clock at the storage yard of the Blackburn Oil Company here consumed the last of the oil and gasoline in the large tanks and flickered out shortly after 10 o’clock this morning.”*

“South Carolina Hit By ‘Quake’”, read the headlines in the **October 21, 1924** edition of The Gettysburg Times (Pennsylvania). *“The Piedmont District of South Carolina was severely shaken yesterday by an earthquake. The tremors were felt*

in towns and cities in Spartanburg and Greenville counties.” This was the second quake to hit the upstate in a little over eleven years that was felt and caused much apprehension.

A huge controversy between the City of Gaffney, the American LaFrance Fire Engine Company, and Spartanburg was aired in The Gaffney Ledger on **April 23, 1925**. The article explains: *“Documentary evidence purporting to show that the American LaFrance Fire Engine Company, of Elmira, N. Y., sold Spartanburg two fire engines on a trade that amounted in effect to a 25 per cent reduction from the list price was presented before the Gaffney City Council Monday night by former Congressman J. F. Byrnes of Spartanburg and Congressman Sam J. Nichols.”*

The article continues, *“Mr. Byrnes showed that Spartanburg made a contract for the purchase of one type 75 triple combination 750 gallon pumper and on prices of \$12,500 and \$8,000, making smaller machine at the respective list of a total of \$20,000. At the same time the American LaFrance Company gave Spartanburg a supplemental contract providing for the company to purchase certain material from the city, including one old fire truck, four horses and two sets of double harnesses, for \$3,650. According to Mr. Byrnes, the company’s representative at the time promised Mayor John F. Floyd that this property would not be moved, but before paying out any money on the contract Mr. Floyd had the city clerk write the Atlanta office of the company and ask for confirmation of this agreement. A carbon copy of the Spartanburg’s city clerk’s letter, together with a confirmatory reply thereto, signed by P. O. Mebert, manager of the Atlanta office, was exhibited. Mr. Byrnes, Mr. Nicholls and Mr. Dobson agreed that the Spartanburg trade amounted in effect legally to a rebate to the city. The three lawyers also stated that any contract made on the basis of a ‘guaranteed price,’ which was later proven to have been misrepresented, invalidated the contract.”*

The Charlotte Observer on **December 5, 1926** informed its readers that *“Spartanburg firemen will soon be doing their ‘daily dozen.’ City council has made an appropriation to engage a physical instructor who will give the members of the department calisthenics twice a day.”*

In **1926** Spartanburg purchased a motorized “tiller” ladder truck from the Seagrave Fire Engine Company. This truck required two firemen to maneuver through the streets...one to drive the front cab and one to steer the rear around

sharp corners and narrow streets. This truck is now being fully restored and has a 75 ft. wooden ladder that requires a manual crank to raise and lower the aerial device

The Gaffney Ledger, dated **April 9, 1927**, reported on Gaffney's biggest fire. *"While the amount of the damage is yet to be determined, the high school fire undoubtedly caused the heaviest financial loss ever sustained from flames here."* According to the article, the Spartanburg Fire Department was requested to send assistance. *"The Spartanburg fire department promptly dispatched a truck with sufficient men to operate it. The machine broke down at Cowpens. Chief W. D. Mitchell and Firemen Clyde Ellis and Frank Johnson came on to Gaffney while the remainder of the party took the disabled truck back to Spartanburg. The Spartanburg firemen rendered valuable assistance by helping in the use of the local equipment. Chief Mitchell gave instructions concerning the best method of getting at the blaze, while his men jumped into the fray."*

"Spartanburg Fire Department Sends Aid to Combat Flames that Rage More than 4 Hours," read the headlines of The Gaffney Ledger printed on **May 29, 1928**. According to the story, Gaffney Mayor V. H. Lopscomb *"telephoned a call for assistance to Spartanburg Chief W. D. Mitchell, of the Spartanburg department, and a squad of firemen responded with a truck."* Later in the article, a bit of humor was noted by the writer...*"Large numbers of Gaffney people watched the fire, which, perhaps was the most disastrous Gaffney has ever suffered from a financial standpoint. Policemen tried to keep the block cleared, but found the task impossible until the Spartanburg firemen, in changing the position of a line of hose, accidentally let the water shoot straight down the street, which then cleared in record time."*

On **June 4, 1928**, The Greenville News announced that *"Spartanburg's new home-made chemical fire truck gives promise of being every bit as fast and efficient as a factory built product. Built by placing the body of an old fire vehicle on the chassis of a new high speed automobile truck and mounted with the chemical extinguisher tanks the machine goes at 60 miles an hour."*

The Watchman and Southron of Sumter shared an article on **June 23, 1928** that says, *"No wonder little boys want to grow up to be firemen. Especially if they are from Greenville or Spartanburg. With high pressure 3-inch hose lines as weapons the Spartanburg and Greenville fire departments are to have a battle royal. Each*

fire department will have a team of four men. When the Spartanburg fire department challenged the Greenville department recently to meet on neutral ground—some point in Greer—and see which department could wash the other away.”

*“Mitchell Retires As Spartanburg Fire Chief,” reported The Charlotte Observer on **May 24, 1929**. “For 33 years chief of the Spartanburg fire department, W. D. Mitchell has resigned and will receive half pay as a pension and serve as director of fire inspection. L. Toye Cothran, city license inspector, has been elected fire chief. The change will take place July 20. Before he becomes fire chief, Cothran, who is 35 years old, will go either to LaFrance or Seagrave factory for training in the mechanism of fire apparatus and to both a fire station in a large city such as Cincinnati and in a city nearly the size of Spartanburg to receive experience in organizing the department and leading fire combat.”*

The Index-Journal of Greenwood reported on a fire in Spartanburg in their **December 11, 1929** paper. *“Fire of Undetermined origin which broke out in the National Furniture stores building on East Main Street last night did damage today at \$39,000. The fire started on the fourth floor in the mattress and repair department. For some time it smouldered with firemen trying to locate it. A draft through the elevator shaft, after the front windows had been broken, sent flames rapidly over the entire floor and soon it threatened to get beyond control. After three hours firemen confined it to the floor on which it originated.”*

The Gaffney Ledger reported on **June 27, 1931** that *“Fire swept through the McClellan 5 and 10-cent store, 145 East Main Street, Wednesday night, threatening for a time to get beyond control of firemen to menace other buildings in the business section before it was brought under control at 9:30 o’clock. Smoke was seen issuing from the rear of the building by firemen at the central fire station a few minutes before the alarm was turned in. Fire Chief L. T. Cauthran was on his way to investigate the cause of the smoke when the department was summoned...for more than an hour the entire fire fighting force was engaged in an uphill battle against the spread of the flames before they were controlled.”* About the same time the McCellan fire was going on, another fire *“razed the servant quarters and store rooms in an out-house at the home of James Milster...and destroyed antiques valued at from \$15,000 to \$20,000. Efforts of the fire department to combat the blaze were severely hampered by the fact that the*

call was turned in approximately five minutes after the first and almost simultaneously with the second alarm for the fire at McClellan's store on East Main Street."

The Greenville News reported on **July 31, 1931** that *"Insurance losses by fire in Spartanburg for the first six months of 1931 showed a very small increase, \$327.57, over same period last year. Fire Chief Cothran, in giving out the figures, stated that during first six months of this year a great many more fires have occurred. Chief Cothran's explanation of larger figures for this year is the McLellan's store fire on June 24 with a loss of approximately \$20,000 on a stock of over \$50,000."*

The Greenville News announced in the **September 22, 1931** printing of the paper that *"A fire which might have done untold damage on Bishop Street last night, resulted in the burning of only about 15 to 20 feet of canvas at the 'big tent' belonging to Spark's circus. The fire alarm called out two trucks from the Central Fire Station at 11:40 on Sunday night, but the flames had been discovered before they had time to spread, and it was quickly checked with chemicals. By reason of the quick work of the firemen, the show will go on today and the pleasure of the hundreds of children will not be 'damaged' by the fire."*

The **December 9, 1931** edition of The Greenville News printed that *"T. W. Woodworth, manager of a local bakery and former Fire Chief W. D. Mitchell happened to be passing the summer homes of Geo. B. Tripp and Rev. H. V. Tanner at Lake Summitt yesterday and saw both houses destroyed by fire. They notified the Green River Manufacturing company at Tuxedo where a crew was organized to fight the fire, but upon their return to the site both the Tripp and Tanner dwellings were practically destroyed. The fire was soon under control and several other homes in the vicinity were saved."*

Spartanburg sent help to Woodruff on **July 10, 1932** to fight a fire in a theatre and the J. N. Boyce Jewelry Store. According to The Greenville News, *"Spartanburg's assistant fire chief, W. O. Blackwell, responded to a request from the town officials for aid by sending a combination chemical and hose truck here at 1 a.m. in charge of Horace Caldwell and Burton Ezell which was of great service to the local fire fighters who had been battling the flames for more than an hour."*

The Charlotte Observer reported on **July 14, 1935** that *“C. S. Warlick, Spartanburg fire chief, who ranked close to the top in South Carolina checkers when he retired from the game some years ago, signaled his return to checkers by winning the annual Spartanburg county tourney held July 4. The Spartanburg County Checker Association is said to be the oldest checker organization in South Carolina.”*

“Blackwell To Be Spartan Fire Chief,” read the heading noted in *The Greenville New* on **December 19, 1935**. *“W. O. Blackwell will succeed C. S. Warlick next Saturday as chief of the Spartanburg fire department, and two assistant chiefs and four captains will be stepped up to their new rank. Mr. Blackwell, formerly assistant chief, was elected during the semi-annual civil service election held at the regular meeting of the city council yesterday afternoon. Warlick will retain a position in the fire department.”*

“Fireman Off Duty Finds He Can’t Escape His Job,” read a caption in *The Times-Mail* of Bedford, Indiana, on **April 30, 1936**. *“Assistant Fire Chief Ike Miller had a job drop right at his feet—on his night off. Out for a stroll, a burning ember dropped at his feet and he looked up to discover an awning ablaze. He handled it alone.”*

An article in the *Greenville News*, dated **August 5, 1937**, said that *“Liner A. Wingo, 41, a member of the Spartanburg Fire Department for the last 12 years, died at his home here Wednesday afternoon at 3 o’clock after an illness of six months. The following members of the Spartanburg Fire Department will serve as honorary pallbearers: Cliff Bishop, Con Bain, Paul Burrell, Peter Cline, Paul Ross, Tom Steadman, Charlie Swain, and Grover Nabors.”*

A Windsor, Ontario, Canada newspaper, dated **March 20, 1941**, picked up a story from Spartanburg about the collision of two freight trains in the city. *“Brakeman G. H. Driggers, Conductor D. K. Jones and Flagman Bruce Robinson, on the southbound train, saw lights on the oncoming freight and jumped to safety. One freight was en route north to Spartanburg, the other south to Columbia. The collision occurred almost beneath an overhead bridge at the foot of Glendalyn avenue within the city limits. Railroad officials hurried here to make an investigation. An emergency crew was called from Columbia to help tear the huge engines apart. Rescue crews worked under lights erected by the Spartanburg fire department.”*

The Index-Journal of Greenwood reported on **February 9, 1943** that *“Fire of undetermined origin early this morning completely destroyed the Leader, large West Main Street department store, virtually destroyed the adjoining store and building of Sheridan’s department store and did other damage tentatively estimated at a total of approximately \$250,000. Camp Croft and Greenville fire departments sent apparatus and firemen to assist the Spartanburg fire department in fighting the flames.”*

The Florence Morning News, on **January 18, 1945**, reported on *“A fire which raged for nine hours caused an estimated three quarters of a million dollars in damage to five stores on Spartanburg’s principal thoroughfare today. Fire Commissioner T. J. Cothran, who made the estimate, said the origin of the blaze was undetermined. It broke out at about 5:30 a.m. in Silver’s Five and Ten Cent Store, which was completely destroyed. The fire was fought along an approximately 150-foot stretch including the Cross Jewelry Store, Efired’s Department Store, Worthmore Clothing Store and Mangle’s Ladies Ready To Wear Store.”* The article states that two of 46 firemen who fought the fire were overcome by smoke.

A very brief death announcement was printed in the **April 9, 1946** edition of The Charlotte News about a former Spartanburg Fire Chief. *“William D. Mitchell, 85, for 30 years Spartanburg, S. C., fire chief and for nearly a half century a fireman there, died in a hospital there today.”*

An article appeared in the **June 19, 1947** Greenville News about Spartanburg’s Fire Chief being appointed to the Executive Committee of the State Firemen’s Association. *“K. C. Billings, volunteer fire chief of Lancaster, was elected president of the South Carolina State Firemen’s Association at the one-day annual conference in Greenville yesterday. W. O. Blackwell, chief of the Spartanburg Fire Department, was elected first vice-president.”*

On **April 5, 1948**, The Greenville News told a sad story about a Spartanburg fire. *“Sheriff B. B. Brockman said the cause of the fire which killed three negro children last night has not been determined. The children died in the flames which gutted their small frame home here while their parents were away. He said the victims were Nellie Anna, 3; Bill, 2; and Josephine, 1. Two older children, Sally, 12, and*

Louise, 6, who suffered minor burns, escaped further injury when the ambulance in which they were riding collided with an auto on the way to the hospital.”

The Gaffney Ledger reported in their **March 27, 1951** edition that *“Twelve horses burned to death Saturday in an \$8,500 fire which leveled G. F. Brannon’s livestock barn at Chesnee. Chesnee volunteer firemen and a truck from Spartanburg Fire Department were unable to save the building, but prevented the blaze from spreading to nearby structures. The barn is located in the heart of the business district. Capt. Harry Williams of the Pearl Street Fire Station, in charge of the Spartanburg truck at the fire, said the building had already collapsed when his truck arrived.”*

Again, The Index-Journal of Greenwood shared a story on **May 15, 1952** about a *“Fire of undetermined origin today destroyed a large storage shed and much valuable construction equipment at the Fiske-Carter Company warehouse in the Camp Wadsworth section. Fire department answered the alarm at 9:06 a.m. At 11:45 the fire was reported under control. Sidewalk, road, building and other construction equipment and supplies were reported ruined. Firemen saved the warehouse and offices.”*

The **March 25, 1954** printing of The Greenville News told of a celebrity coming to town. *“Jackie Pung, the Hawaiian hitter, has already visited the Spartanburg Fire Department. She visits local fire stations whenever possible because her husband is a firemen in Honolulu. ‘I have to be able to talk shop with him when I go home,’ Jackie explained. Her husband doesn’t even play golf. Betsy Rawls and Betty MacKinnon were in the clubhouse. They recently conducted a clinic in Greenville. “Betsy is Spartanburg’s most famous golfer, and she would like to win the tourney in her home town—especially since it’s co-named in her honor.”*

“WSPA Goes Back On Air After Fire,” read the headlines of the Greenville News on **May 17, 1960**. *“WSPA radio and television were back on the air Monday after a disastrous fire swept through the building housing the station’s studios, control center and offices in downtown Spartanburg early Monday. Spartanburg Fire Chief E. E. Genoble called all off-duty firemen to duty to battle the blaze which was discovered at 12:12 a.m. Monday by two police officers....the fire burned out of control for almost two hours as the full 64-man force battled to contain it.”*

On **November 14, 1962** The Danville Register of Danville, Virginia, reported the following. *“Spartanburg Fire Chief Ernest Genobles said Tuesday night there is no evidence that an arsonist set fire to the First Baptist Church here. Genobles, referring to a report that the fire was set deliberately, said there ‘is nothing to it.’ The sanctuary and an east wing of the church were destroyed early Tuesday by fire that spread quickly through the recently renovated building. Damage was estimated to be about \$500,000. Genobles said he will lead a team of investigators, including electricians, in a check of the ruins later this week. Earlier, Police Chief Ralph Prince said officers were looking for a man who claimed that he reported fire.”*

The Charlotte Observer reported on the same day that *“Jack Henson, chief fire inspector here, said the cause of the blaze was not known. He discovered rumors that arson was suspected. The blaze was fought by almost 100 firemen—the complete Spartanburg Fire Department and volunteer citizens and units from Whitney and West End.”*

The Index-Journal of Greenwood posted notice of a major fire in Spartanburg on **December 1, 1962**. *“Spontaneous combustion is the suspected cause of the half-million dollar fire which destroyed Carolinas Scenic Stages headquarters building and shops early Friday. Spartanburg Fire Chief Ernest Genoble said the blaze’s origin may have been in an area where combustible chemicals, such as paint removers and cleaning fluids, were stored. The blaze was the third major fire within a two-block area this year.”* However, a SLED investigator had other ideas about the fire’s origin. *“You don’t have fires like this in terms of distance and time unless something is wrong,” commented the State Law Enforcement Division’s arson expert John Powers Friday. SLED is investigating the possibility of arson in a fire at the First Baptist Church here Nov. 13.”*

The Greenville News shared the sad news of former Fire Chief W. O. Blackwell’s death in the **March 26, 1966** printing of the paper. *“W. O. Blackwell, 77, former Spartanburg fire chief died at his home, 724 S. Church Street, Friday at 10 a.m. after a brief illness. Funeral services will be conducted Sunday at 3 p.m. at J. F. Floyd Mortuary by Rev. Fred Brown and Dr. W. H. Clapp. Burial will be in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens with Masonic rites. Pallbearers will be firemen: Charles Swain, R. G. Turner, P. K. Cline, A. C. Beam, C. J. Toney and Harry O’Quinn.”*

It is with deep satisfaction that this writer now puts down his pen from further research of the Spartanburg Fire Department. It has been interesting research to uncover some of the department's stories and legacy which had probably been lost through time or else forgotten by generations long past. This research is certainly not complete and likely found to have some inaccuracies of dates, names, etc. However, the gaps and rest of the history to the present day is now up to others to complete and put to pen. It is this writer's hope that someone will take up the challenge and capture the rest of the department's rich heritage and keep it's legacy alive. History never stops...it is created with each passing day. Remember, we learn from history, but that also means knowing your history!