

## **Early History of The Greenwood Fire Department 1869-1925**

The story of Greenwood and the ultimate advancement of fire protection in that community goes back to the very early part of the 1800s. We know that the backcountry or inland areas of South Carolina really began to open up to colonial frontiersmen, especially at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We, also, know the town of Greenwood was named for the plantation of a settler, John McGehee, in 1824 which was the site of the first white settlement in the piedmont region of the state.

The Greenwood archives reveal that a number of schools were built around 1830 in the area to accommodate the growing population of families. Railroads helped to make the area a transportation hub for the agricultural market and the vast numbers of visitors coming into the region. At one time, it is reported that nearly 27 trains plodded their way through the small town which was finally chartered/incorporated in 1857.

Unfortunately, Greenwood was like so many other communities, villages, towns and cities of the day which experienced the frequent visits of “the fire fiend.” The author, Nancy Backes, said “Americans had for many years helplessly watched their little wooden towns burn and be rebuilt and burn again.” Greenwood was certainly no different, and out of necessity, these fires brought attention to the need to better safeguard its citizens from the ravages of unwanted fires.

This writer will attempt to amplify the rich history of the fire department that is available in order to expand on the struggles, leadership, major challenges, and progression of the Greenwood Fire Department. The history provided in the following pages are taken

verbatim from various newspaper articles and commentaries with an occasional observation of this researcher. So, let's begin!

The Abbeville Press and Banner published on **July 24, 1895**, that *“a fire broke out here about four o'clock Monday morning in the rear part of Tolbert's livery and sales stables. Fortunately, it was discovered in time by Greenwood's vigilant night watchman, Mr. W. R. McKinney, who immediately gave the alarm, and numbers of citizens reached the fire in time to prevent a conflagration. It was the work of an incendiary. Shavings and matches were found at the place where the fire originated.”*

The article underlines the fact that fire protection in the town was dependent on curious citizens answering an alarm and doing what they could with what they had at hand to fight fires. In most cases citizens utilized buckets of water, wet blankets, and axes in an attempt to arrest a fire. However, if the fire was not caught in its beginning stages of progression, the citizens became salvage crews by removing contents and belongings.

The earliest mention of Greenwood addressing the need for improved fire protection is found in the **January 1, 1896**, edition of the Abbeville Press & Banner. The reporter states that *“Greenwood has purchased a fire engine and fixtures, to be delivered soon, first of January I hear. A step in the right direction. Something that we have needed a long time. No progressive city the size of Greenwood can well do without a fire engine.”*

Then, according to the fire department's own history, The Greenwood Index printed a detailed article on **February 25, 1896**, which reveals the town hosted representatives from Newberry, Laurens, and Abbeville Counties to observe a demonstration of the Lundgren Chemical Engine manufactured by the Racine Fire Engine Company of Wisconsin.

Apparently, this device was a hand-drawn, two-wheeled cart affixed with one or two 30 to 40-gallon cylinders filled with a mixture of water and bicarbonate of soda. When positioned to attack a fire, a fireman would rotate the cylinders to mix a proportioned amount of sulfuric acid. The mixture would then create a chemical reaction that would force under pressure the liquid through a rubber hose to hopefully extinguish a blaze. These “chemical engines” were essentially a large version of the old 2 ½ gallon soda-acid fire extinguishers. In that day and time, they were very effective if brought quickly to the fire scene.

Again, the reporter for the Abbeville Press & Banner announces the arrival of the town’s new apparatus in their **February 26, 1896**, printing of the paper. It states, *“Greenwood’s fire engine and hook and ladders have come. The engine is a chemical fire extinguisher. We get them on trial. If we like it we are to pay for it, if not we return it. This is something that Greenwood has needed for a long time. I think every town that can, ought to buy an engine. I don’t know what it cost.”*

Still there is much confusion concerning did Greenwood buy any sort of apparatus or not, and did the town have an organized fire company. This writer researched the digital files of the Sanborn Map collection of South Carolina to see if it could shed some light on the issue, and I found some interesting facts. The Sanborn Map Company out of New York was an early version of ISO today. The company published detailed information and maps of towns and cities during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today they are useful for historical research and contain enormous amounts of information regarding the strength of local fire departments and details of their water works.

The Sanborn Maps dated **June of 1898** reveals that the Water Works was not even in the process of being constructed but is to be in operation by August 10, 1898. Really? When completed the system would have a pumping station, an elevated steel tank 100 ft. high with

a 200,000 capacity. The mains will vary from 10" to 4" along the business portion of town. There will be 54 dbl. hydrants with an average pressure of 50 psi. Now, there was a notation of importance that says the town is *"to have hose carts and hose when water works in operation."*

Interestingly, it's a bit clearer now that the town actually did not purchase the apparatus discussed on numerous occasions. And, what is clear is that in 1896, there was no "organized" fire delivery system as evidenced by the Evening Index, **October 11, 1898**, article which says, *"It would be the irony of fate for a destructive fire to visit Greenwood just after the water works system is completed, and before we have an organized fire company. The water works will be worth mighty little to us without an equipped and drilled fire company."*

But, the first mention of organizing a fire company for the town is gleaned from town council records dated **October 14, 1898**. It seems that D. C. DuPree, W. G. Gambrell, and James O. Singleton were *"appointed as a committee to organize said company and take charge of hose."* Curiously, there apparently was no action taken between October and December when council met on **December 6, 1898**, to respond to a petition requesting that a fire company be organized, but no action was taken except to appoint J. T. Simmons as chairman, J. T. McKellar and W. G. Gambrell of a new committee.

Finally, council appears to have taken some action in the new year, some nine months later on **September 14, 1899**, when Mr. W. B. Iler was elected chief of the fire department. According to town records, there is some mention *"of fire hose not being properly cared for and the recommendation that a house be erected to care for the hose and reel and a committee was appointed for that purpose and to complete the organization of the fire company."*

It's very difficult for this writer to decipher what actually took place between the showing of the chemical engine in 1896 and 1899. However, it seems consistent with the reporting that ultimately the town did not purchase any apparatus or form any organized fire company other than purchasing fire hose and a two-wheel, hand-drawn reel to carry several hundred feet of hose. The council's thinking was likely why waste money when we will soon have a water system with hydrants that we can connect to in order to apply water on a fire.

Be that as it may, we know that Mr. Iler seemingly did organize some sort of fire company as reflected in the **March 7, 1901**, edition of the Evening Index paper. The headlines read, "*GREENWOOD'S FIRE COMPANY,*" with the following commentary: "*What has become of our company of gallant fire laddies? Greenwood's Fire Department was organized in name, and the usual apathy fell upon it, and---well, that's all of it. A commendable spirit of interest was manifested by the young men, and it is not well to let this feeling go unrecognized. The possibilities of a fire company were fully shown at the little blaze at the Court House recently. There is no matter so important, so vital, so necessary as this one of a thoroughly organized, thoroughly equipped fire company. Let the City Council give good heed to the needs of our Volunteer Fire Company, and The Index will vouch for their faithfulness.*"

This writer senses that the town's citizens were becoming frustrated over the lack of a really efficient organized fire department as evidenced by yet another article in The Daily Index which headlined on **September 28, 1902**, "*HOW MUCH LONGER.*" It goes on to say, "*How much longer are we to do without an organized fire company? How many thousand dollars more are we to invest in bonfires before we get tired of the thing and have a few dollars invested in equipping a fire department. After every fire, it the same old story, 'we'll have to do something.'* The conditions are alarming to say nothing of the disgrace

*and shame of the thing. Think of a town the size of Greenwood at the mercy of a fire. No fire protection. Hydrants quarter of a mile apart almost and a few hundred feet of hose!"*

Well, a couple of years passed without too much commotion in town between the fire company and the citizens of Greenwood. However, on **May 25, 1904**, a devastating fire occurred in town. Nearly forty businesses were destroyed by a fast-moving fire which raced through the structures, many which were constructed of wood and further fueled by wooden sidewalks and overhangs. One fatality was suffered in the blaze, a Mrs. Anna Mosely. Among businesses lost to the fire was the Spigel Brothers hotel and store, the Greenwood Hardware Company, the First National Bank, Palmetto Grocery Store, and the J. R. Hinton Grocery.

The Greenville News reported on **May 26, 1904**, a kind editorial in praise of the fire department. It said, "*THEY RENDERED GALLANT SERVICE AT GREENWOOD DISASTER.*" The editor's perspective stated "*T. H. Walker, of Greenwood, who arrived in the city yesterday from the fire stricken town, said last night that the thing which impressed him most was the gallant and heroic work of the volunteer fire department.*" He went on to relate, "*There was some delay in getting the water pressure,*" said Mr. Walker, "*but in spite of that trouble the department proved its real fitness and did everything possible to check the speed of the flames. It was sickening to watch the destruction of so many substantial buildings, but the people have not been discouraged in the least and already they have made arrangements to enter the business field again. Greenwood is not the sort of town to stop now. Those old structures will rise no more, of course, but new stores will be erected, and even if the loss was severe it will not be noted in the future.*"

The article went on to say, *“A passenger from Greenwood informed a reporter for The Greenville News yesterday that the only part of Mrs. Mosley’s body which was found after the fire was her heart.”*

On **June 2, 1904**, The Evening Index came out with a commentary about *“THE GREENWOOD FIRE”* and talks about the lesson learned. It says in part, *“Now for the lesson. Greenwood will not forget the one it has had, but let other towns learn. They had a voluntary fire department, which was very good in its way. Well, there be those who do not like its way. Fire protection nothing less than absolutely unquestionable is something no town or city can afford not to have, no matter what it costs. This fire broke out about two hundred yards from the standpipe containing enough water perhaps to float the whole building. But the alarm was given by the whistle of a freight train which chanced to pass that way. One good fire engine manned by two or three trusty men properly trained could have extinguished the flames in a few minutes. The water was not lacking, it was the pressure.”*

The article continued, *“the town of Greenwood, it seems, has been depending upon the city water works without having an organized force with adequate apparatus. They had no system of alarm but depended upon their telephone system and the volunteers who very naturally were asleep at 3 o’clock in the morning.”* So, the rest of the story confirms some inattention by Council to the weaknesses and details of running a fire department, but we’ll see later that many improvements were made over time.

Fortunately, no significant occurrences were found in this writer’s research dealing with the fire department. It was noted, however, The Evening Index talked about two Christmas suppers given to the firemen, both in the **December 29, 1904** and the **December 21, 1905** editions of the paper. The 1904 paper headlined: *“AN OYSTER SUPPER”* and commented that *“The firemen of Greenwood were tendered an*

*oyster supper at the Greenwood hotel last Friday night. The members of the fire department, the mayor and council and water commissioners were present. The supper has become an annual feature and is but a small tribute to the splendid services of Fire Chief Arch Iler and his volunteer men."*

The in the 1905 paper, we read where *"FIRE LADDIES TO HAVE XMAS SUPPER."* The article went on to say, *"The member of the Greenwood Fire Department will hold their annual Xmas supper on Friday night in the vacant store formerly occupied by Sharidan & Hart. The supper this year will not be furnished by the city, but was made possible by a public subscription. Greenwood appreciates her fire fighters, which fact was plainly shown by the eagerness of most every business man to subscribe to the fund for the supper."*

The **January 10, 1907** edition of The Evening Index talks about the *"FIREMEN'S FUND"* which today is referred to as the fire department *"1% Fund."* The article states, *"The Greenwood fire laddies are in on the new law which imposes a tax of two per cent on the gross premiums of insurance paid in the town of Greenwood. Chief A. S. Iler has filed the proper papers and the town of Greenwood is reported by the comptroller general as being one in which the law is effective. The membership of Greenwood is given as 40 members and the value of its equipment at \$11,399."*

Then in the **March 14, 1907**, The Evening Index, appears an article reporting *"The city council has bought a pair of big draft horses for the hose and ladder truck of the Greenwood fire department. The horses were bought in North Carolina and cost \$400."*

An editorial writer for the Greenwood Daily Journal wrote a piece on **October 16, 1907**, which entreated the readers to consider applying appreciation over harsh criticism towards the town's firemen. He

wrote in the headliner: *"A WORD IN DEFENSE Of THE FIRE DEPARTMENT,"* and commences his narration by saying *"recently Greenwood has had the misfortune to have several fires and in the last few weeks people have taken occasion to speak in very harsh terms of the Greenwood Fire Department. Some say that it is just and some maintain that it is without foundation. We are of the opinion that this city has one of the best if not the best volunteer fire departments in the State."*

The editor continues, *"To some this may seem rather a broad statement, however, it is not. Volunteer fire departments labor under great disadvantages. In the first place we have no fire alarm system, therefore, it is difficult to locate a fire and necessarily takes some time. In the second place they are always being 'knocked.'"*

Finally, the editor says, *"There are two serious handicaps. Think of how good it is for these men to rise from their peaceful slumbers to fight a fire, when they are not receiving a penny for their services. After all things are considered we think, that the people should lay aside their little hammers."*

A year passes and then another calamity. The Evening Index relates on **October 8, 1908**, the following about the *"WRECK IN C & W YARDS...LOCAL PASSENGER CRASHES INTO CABOOSE OF FREIGHT TRAIN TUESDAY NIGHT."* The story goes, *"The C. & W. came dangerously near having a most serious wreck to happen to it in its local yards here Tuesday night. Part of a freight train standing on the main line broke loose and the rear part of it started on a gentle rolling journey towards Augusta. Coming up from Augusta was the local passenger train, which is due to arrive here about 8 o'clock. The passenger was in charge of Conductor Hernion. Just about the Southern's water tank opposite Greenwood Oil Mill, the two came together. The passenger engine, No. 110, was coming at a pretty fair*

*rate of speed and when it struck the caboose at the end of the broken train it simply ploughed it way through it. The caboose was completely wrecked. The engine lost its cow catcher, its smokestack and had the end of the boiler crushed in. Fortunately Engineer Manning and his fireman were not killed outright. The wreck caused considerable excitement and drew a large crowd of people. The Greenwood fire department was called out to put out the flames. Two passengers were slightly injured."*

A few weeks later on **October 29, 1908**, The Evening Index reports on some positive news for a change: "*PLANS ABOUT READY FOR HOME FOR CITY OFFICIALS AND FIRE DEPARTMENT.*" The reporter says, "*Messrs. Cothran & Cothran, architects, have about completed plans for the handsome two-story brick building which in the future will accommodate the Greenwood fire department and the home of the city officials. The building will be located on the lot purchased from Dr. W. B. Milwee, just across the alley which runs by the store of J. P. Brooks. The building will front on the Square. It will have two stories. The first story will be used for the fire department. Upstairs there will be a room for city council, a room for the mayor to hold his court, and also the much talked of and greatly needed "rest room" for ladies. The building will have a handsome front. It will be quite an addition to the Square and will also fill a long felt need.*"

Excitement and anticipation is noted in a reporter's announcement in the **June 30, 1909**, edition of the Greenwood Daily Journal. "*The State Firemen's Tournament will be held in Union, July 6, 7, and 8<sup>th</sup>. Extensive preparations are being made and the Tournament give promise of being one of the best ever. The Greenwood Fire Department has been practicing hard for the occasion and they will no doubt make an excellent showing. Following is a list of the delegates from this city: Messrs. C. M. Reyunilds, M. B. Sanders, Clarence Beaudrot, E. A. Adams, J. G. Wilson, R. I. Elledge and three from each mill.*"

Two months later, a fire occurred at the Grendel Mill, and the reporter wrote about its occurrence in the Greenwood Daily Journal on **August 11, 1909**. *“Fire broke out Saturday night at 11:30 o’clock in the spinning room of the Grendel Mill on the fourth floor. The fire gained headway rapidly and if it had not been for the Greenwood Fire Department greater damage would have been done. They reached the scene in about 10 minutes and did effective work. The origin of the fire is unknown. The damage has been estimated at three or four thousand dollars. A number of spinning frames were put out of commission but they will be promptly repaired and work will go on as usual.”*

On **October 13, 1909**, The Greenwood Daily Journal announced *“in a short while Greenwood will have one of the best fire departments in the State for the size of the city. By making the improvements and additions Greenwood will get a better fire insurance rate which will mean a saving of about \$10,000 to those carrying fire insurance. A new single hose wagon arrived here Tuesday. A new horse has also been purchased and additional hose added to the present supply. Later on another horse will be purchased and a white fireman will be employed to stay at the fire department.”*

The next day, **October 14, 1909**, The Evening Index headlined: *“NEW HOSE WAGON AND HORSE. WAGON SHOWS UP BETTER THAN THE HORSE, BUT HE’LL IMPROVE.”* After that the reporter states, *“The Greenwood Fire Department has a brand spanking new single hose wagon of the latest design and also a horse of the regulation design, but the wagon shows up a little better than the horse just now. The horse will fatten though and will make a good appearance when he does. Chief Sanders and City Clerk W. G. Calhoun were taking a little drive in the new wagon behind the new horse yesterday morning, but Clerk Calhoun friends did not think he looked quite as comfortable on*

*the wagon as he does in his office chair in the new city hall. They may have been prejudiced.”*

The Evening Index published on **January 13, 1910**, is excited to report that *“The Greenwood fire department is coming. Tuesday morning a fire was put out in one of the cottages belonging to Mrs. May on South Main Street within ten minutes of the time when the alarm was made. In other words, the alarm was made, the run made and the fire was put out all in ten minutes. This is going some and all will be given credit by Mr. Parker, who is here to re-rate the town. In this connection Fire Chief M. B. Saunders asks that everybody have a general cleaning up as Mr. Parker is to make a general tour of inspection this week and all premises should be clean and kept clean.”*

Good news is reported in The Greenwood Daily Journal on **August 3, 1910**, when it revealed that *“The Greenwood Fire Department is in receipt of a check for fifty dollars which was sent by the Seaboard officials for the valuable service rendered them during several fires in this city. In several cases the fire department has put out fires and saved a number of freight cars.”*

From the Town Council minutes dated **February 7, 1911**, a motion was made by F. S. Evans and 2<sup>nd</sup> by C. B. Alexander that the Town of Greenwood, S. C., accepts the contract offered for the Gamewell Fire Alarm System, and that the Mayor is authorized to close the contract with the company for the system as for their offer. The motion carried. This was a welcome advancement for the fire department and the town’s citizens. For years the town had gone without a reliable method of alarm notification, and this system would surely go a long way to moving the department forward in the years to come.

The Evening Index announced that Fire Chief Saunders had been made the Southeastern Manager for C. C. C. Fire Hose Company, in their

**March 9, 1911**, printing of the paper. *“Mr. Marius B. Saunders, who has been for a number of years chief of the Greenwood Fire Department and superintendent of streets has tendered his resignation to the city council as he has accepted the position of Southeastern Manager for the C. C. C. Fire Hose and Rubber Co. He will have his offices here but will devote a large part of his time to travelling as his territory covers a number of Southeastern States. His firm is one of the largest in the world, having offices in many large cities. They make a specialty of manufacturing fire hose and fire department specialties and are well known to the fire service in the United States. The position is a very lucrative one and Mr. Saunders’s friends are congratulating him on his good luck. Mr. Saunders is also vice president of the South Carolina State Firemen’s Association. Firemen generally over the State give him a large part of the credit for the present law giving the State the Firemen’s Pension Act.”*

The Greenwood Daily Index made a brief but attention-grabbing comment on **June 10, 1911**, by saying *“There hasn’t been any noise recently about the Greenwood fire alarm system.”*

The Greenwood Index carried a curious story in the **November 25, 1911**, edition of the paper where it makes reference to fire alarm boxes. However, up until this time, there has been no mention of the installation of an alarm system. Nevertheless, here’s what is printed:

Box No.

12 Corner Washington and Main St., near Geo. Taylors

14 Corner Circular and Main St., near Mrs. L. A. Arnold

16 Corner Swygert and Owen St. Bamberg Section

18 Corner Edgefield Avenue and Park St., near F. M. Sheridans

...and the list goes on to Box No. 47 Corner Reynolds and Blake St.

Then the reporter adds this to his comments from the Spartanburg Journal: *“Half Never Told”...“The Greenwood Journal suggests an*

*automobile fire engine for Greenwood. Do they have a fire engine in Greenwood?"*

Sunday, **March 3, 1912**, was a day in the life of Greenwood that was a disaster in its own right, but it was a blessing that circumstances were not any worse. The Laurens Advertiser reports in its headlines on **March 6, 1912**, that *"THE OREGON HOTEL DESTROYED BY FLAMES."* The reporter gives a lengthy update of what happened. *"The Oregon hotel and its block of stores here were totally destroyed by fire early this morning. Where once stood the famous hotel is now a mere smoldering heap of burning debris with fragments of ruined brick walls and useless chimneys standing upright in the midst."*

*"The fire represents a property loss of approximately \$140,000, with perhaps less than half that amount in insurance. The loss to the town is far greater than the figures would indicate. The Oregon hotel has been one of the town's greatest features ever since its establishment, and to be deprived of it is a very great loss indeed. Most fortunately no lives were lost."*

The reporter continues his writing by describing *"The origin of the fire is unknown. It was discovered about 2 o'clock this morning. The fire alarm register shows that the fire alarm was turned at 2:15 o'clock. A negro bellboy, Bert Lewis, was the first person aware of the fire. The smoke filling the downstairs corridor aroused him. He says he tried to use the emergency hose, but could not make any headway against the flames, and threw it down to arouse Mr. Brinson, the proprietor, and the guests. At that time the fire was in the store room from most of the known facts. The fire must have started either in this room, which is just back of the pool room, or in the rear of a pressing club just adjoining. The proprietor, H. S. Brinson, inclines to the opinion that spontaneous combustion may account for the fire, certain materials in*

*this room making it possible for the fire to gain headway very rapidly if such were the case.”*

There were some narrow escapes described in the article. *“Mr. Brinson says that his first thought was to awaken a lady, Mrs. Hewlett, of an advanced age and an aged couple, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, both rather feeble. Those on the second floor were gotten out but lost all their effects. Both Mrs. Hewlett and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas are from New Jersey and have been spending the winter here. Meanwhile, the work of arousing the guests was going on, and some miraculous escapes were had by those on the third floors, who failed to realize the rapidity of the flames and the dangerous effects of immense clouds of smoke rolling through the entire building. G. Strauss of Atlanta, a well-known traveling man, had the closest call of any. He was on the third floor, took time to dress completely, but when he went out into the corridor he was overcome by smoke. He did not know which way to turn to find air and an outlet. Rushing back into the room, he appeared at the window and screamed for help. Max Arnold of Greenwood saw his plight, made his way up the fire escape into the room and practically carried him out and brought him down the escape to safety. Mr. Strauss says he was helpless and ready to drop when he was brought out. He was in bed this morning and very weak, but will be himself in a day or two.”*

A bit of history was included in the article and no mention of the fire department's operations at this fire. *“The Oregon Hotel was built by the late Joel S. Bailey in 1899 and opened to the public that year under the management of H. J. Brinson, who has kept it continuously. Last year Joel S. Bailey, Jr., for his mother, added the annex, a handsome three-story structure with four stores on the first floor, doubling the capacity of the hotel.”*

Even before the details of the fire had been shared with the public, The Greenwood Daily Journal dated the day after the fire, **March 4, 1912**, published the following, *“GREENWOOD’S FIRE DEPARTMENT LIKE UNTO A FORT WITHOUT GUNS!”* The editor penned this commentary: *“Greenwood is proud of the men who are members of the volunteer fire department. They have for years done everything in their power to protect the lives and property of the people of this city.”*

He continues, *“At all hours they have responded to the call of the fire alarm. But the mere fact that we have men who are willing to do everything in their power to fight fire does not give us a good fire department. The fire fighting equipment here is said to be as good as any town in the State but it is a known fact that the pressure of the water at the fire here Sunday morning was pitifully weak—it was hard to get a stream of water in the second story of the Oregon hotel building. In other words Greenwood’s fire department seems to be like a fort without guns. The men were ready to fight fire but it is a known fact that fire cannot be conquered without water and a good stream of water at that.”*

*“The statement was made that several hose were connected with the water and this weakened the pressure. If this be the case DIG UP THE WATER MAINS AND PUT IN LARGER ONES WHICH WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO PROTECT THE PROPERTY IN GREENWOOD. All of the pumps were working Sunday morning and still there wasn’t enough pressure.”*

*“In this connection we wish to state that we do not blame the city fathers and the Superintendent of the Water and Light Plant. They have done what they could but we do say if they know that the lack of water pressure is a weak point they ought to come out and say so. TELL THE PEOPLE ABOUT IT AND SET TO WORK NOW TO BETTER CONDITIONS.”*

*“The man, who was on duty at the hotel, turned a stream at the fire but he states that the pressure was weak and that he was without help. He was forced to save the lives of those who were asleep in the building. When they were awakened terror reigned and amid the cries for help the faithful night watchman did all in his power to save the lives of the guests in the hotel and at the same time try to get help to fight the fire.”*

*“What saved the adjoining buildings from being burned? The local fire department? NO! GOD IN HIS MERCY BROUGHT THE RAIN WHICH EXTINGUISHED THE BURNING SPARKS AND TEMPERED THE WINDS WHICH BLEW THE SPARKS OF FIRE AWAY FROM THE CLOSEST BUILDINGS.”*

*“After the serious fire of a number of years ago, which swept numbers of buildings in its path, there was enthusiasm aroused here for a paid fire department but it soon faded into nothingness. Years have passed—another fire has come and it has robbed Greenwood of her greatest asset advertisement. Nothing has been done. WILL WE WAIT FOR ANOTHER SERIOUS DISASTER? AND WILL THE PEOPLE WHO PAY TAXES SIT IDLY BY, LIKE HUMBLE SHEEP, AND BE LED BY OTHERS WHO DO NOT SEEM DISPOSED TO GIVE US FIRE PROTECTION? Mr. Citizen, it is up to you.”*

On Tuesday, **March 5, 1912**, The Greenwood Daily Journal talks about the *“RUINS OF OREGON HOTEL BUILDING BEING TORN DOWN FOR SAKE OF SAFETY.”* *“Mayor K. Baker is to be commended for his prompt action in having the walls of the Oregon hotel torn down. They were dangerous and if they had they been allowed to remain in all probability someone would have been hurt by the falling of the ruins. A large force of hands was employed yesterday and today pulling down the walls and moving the brick from the streets.”*

It is apparent from the next article that city council has heard the demands of the media and public to improve its fire protection within the city. The Greenwood Daily Journal on **March 8, 1912**, reveals some action. *“The regular monthly meeting of the City Council was held last night in the city hall. The City Clerk’s and Chief of Police’s reports were read and received as information....FIRE APPARATUS...Mayor Baker stated in reference to an auto fire fighting apparatus that city engineer J. W. Wells had visited Savannah to investigate the Seagrave’s machine. He advised the city council to have him also visit the cities of Charleston and Florence to see other makes of auto fire machines. Mr. Wells states that he saw one of these machines throw a stream of water for 200 feet. The auto fire engine can be used to carry hose, ladders, and it also has a pump operated by the gasoline motor which drives the car. In other words, the auto fire apparatus is a combination fire wagon and pump. With one of these machines it is said that the water pressure here will be as strong as is needed to fight the worst kind of fires.”*

The same article talks about yet another issue which has not been kicked around in other newspaper stories...the problem of muddy streets and the difficulty in getting around town. *“In this connection Mr. Wells advised the Council in reference to a rock crusher and the best way to improve the streets and roads. The Council requested the Mayor and city engineer to get prices on a rock crusher and also look into the matter of securing rock. The plan of the council seems to be to purchase a rock crusher which will be used in the improvement of the streets of the city. If all of the streets are improved by a layer of crushed rocks it will be possible to use the auto fire engine in any kind of weather. City Clerk W. G. Calhoun has letters from a number of cities where the auto fire apparatus is being used, stating that they are highly pleased with them. Stress is also laid on the fact that they have been able to use their auto engines in the mud when it was impossible to use horses.”*

Wow...with unbelievable speed, the Mayor and City Council finally make a decision on a fire engine. But, it isn't what has been discussed up until now. Wait and see....Sumter's Watchman and Southron paper reports in its **March 27, 1912**, edition that "*GREENWOOD BUYS FIRE TRUCK.*" "*Greenwood, March 21--At a special meeting held at city hall Tuesday evening the city council bought an auto fire truck which, with a steamer, that is to say, a steam engine to be drawn by the auto fire truck, will, it is believed give the town of Greenwood all the fire protection it needs and will obviate the pressure problem that is such a menace. Technically, the truck is a combination truck or chemical and hose wagon of 80 horse power. The machine is to be used as a tractor and will draw a steamer which has been negotiated for. The fire auto is of the six cylinder type, air cooled motor, with 50 (paper misquoted as having 550 gal. tank) gallon chemical tank and 1,500 feet of hose. The machine is powerful in construction and weighs 7,500 pounds. I has combination gas and electric lights with self starting apparatus. Before purchasing any engine, the council sent the city engineer, J. W. Wells, Capt. F. S. Evans and J. L. Beaudrot of the city council on a tour of inspection to various town in this section. The car bought is the same type used in Birmingham, New Orleans and other large cities.*"

On **May 2, 1912**, The Evening Index reports "*NEW STEAMER IS ALL RIGHT.*" The article continues, "*The steamer engine which the Greenwood Fire Department secured in a trade for a hose wagon with the Charleston Fire Department was given a preliminary test last Wednesday afternoon and its performances were entirely satisfactory. It throws a powerful stream and it is remarkable how quickly the pressure can be secured. It takes only about ten minutes to get up enough steam to furnish the pressure needed. Meanwhile the engine is so constructed that the regular stand pipe pressure can be used right through the engine, so that there will be no delay in putting water on a fire. Some idea of the pressure may be had when it is stated that it took five men to hold the nozzle last Wednesday afternoon when the highest pressure*

*was on. In speaking of the engine Mayor Baker said he believed it would throw a stream over the stand pipe and that in a few days a test would be made."*

**On July 11, 1912,** The Evening Index reports on a bizarre event that demonstrates the level of competition and rivalry fire departments had between each other back in the day. The headline reads: *"FIRE AUTO IN ANDERSON. Greenwood's Fine New, Brand New, Auto Truck in Anderson Last Week."* Now the story begins...*"Greenwood's fine new auto truck and the fire department made a trip to Anderson last Thursday and this is what the Anderson Intelligencer said about the truck and other things: Racing into Anderson yesterday afternoon Chief M. B. Saunders of Greenwood fire department challenged the Anderson fire chief to bring out the local auto truck into the square and let the Andersonians see the two wagons together. This the local chief did not do."*

The report goes on to describe in detail the unfolding events. *"Chief Saunders with 25 firemen came from Greenwood yesterday afternoon making the 43 miles, he said, in one hour and fifty-one minutes. Mayor Kenneth Baker, representing city council, A. J. Sroles, the superintendent of the water and light plant, W. G. Calhoun, city treasurer, the chief and twenty firemen made up the crew that boarded Greenwood's truck and came into the city of Anderson. The Greenwood auto truck is the one, it will be recalled, that created such a stir here at the time the local truck was purchased. At that time The Intelligencer claimed that the local truck cost too much money. In Rock Hill also it is stated by the Greenwood men the firemen from that city sought comparison with the local truck but same was not had. Chief Saunders said he did not come there seeking trouble but merely to show the people of Anderson the Greenwood auto truck. Chief Saunders is southern agent for the Seagrave people of Columbus, Ohio, who claim to be the oldest builders in the world and that they have sold every notable city under the*

*commission form of government. Columbia was not in this list. The company has sold nine machines for fire work in Denver, five in Shreveport, 1 in Galveston, some in Des Moines and have 52 in Los Angeles and in San Francisco."*

*Well, let's continue this saga as the reporter continues, "The machine that strolled into Anderson yesterday is a combination chemical and hose wagon truck carrying two thousand feet of hose. The local truck cost \$500 more than the Greenwood truck and there is a difference in the two machines in favor of the Greenwood truck, as the people of Anderson saw for themselves. The machine is air cooled and is upholstered. The machine is nearly new. After arriving in Anderson, Chief Saunders rolled his car to the Intelligencer office. Here about forty persons took refuge on the huge car and the machine rolled down Main street stopping in front of the local fire department. There Chief Saunders asked the local chief to come out with the car. The local chief said he would beat the Greenwood truck and Chief Saunders admitted that the local truck might outrun him a little. But, when asked to bring the two truck together to the square this was not done. A few words and the Greenwood car pulled taking a party for a 'little joy ride' about the city. It took hills and grades with ease."*

Over a year passed without any significant news about the fire department. However, The Evening Index reported in their **October 23, 1913**, paper that *"Fire Chief Joe Beaudrot and Messrs. C. L. Beaudrot and A. E. Adams, of the Greenwood Fire Department went to Anderson Sunday to attend the funeral of the two Anderson firemen who were killed by the falling of a wall during a fire there last Thursday night."*

On a happy note, The Greenwood Daily Journal, in their **June 26, 1914**, edition joyfully announced *"LOCAL FIREMEN FIRST IN HOSE WAGON RACE."* The article reads, *"With \$100 in cash money captured in the hose wagon contest, the Greenwood fire department boys returned*

*home this morning from Florence. They are enthusiastic over their trip and the reception accorded them by the 'Little Gate City' and are already predicting a great time for Greenwood next June when the next State Tournament will be held in this city."*

The article goes into lengthy details so this writer will only hit the most striking features. *"Greenwood captured the first money in the Hose Wagon contest on Palmetto course this morning, getting water in 31 seconds. The dash to the hydrant was made in 15 and 3/10 seconds. The prize was \$100. Marion came in for second money, \$50, time 31 2/5 seconds. Thirteen hose wagon teams entered the contest."*

Another year passes, and the State Firemen's Tournament is on the minds of every fireman. The Anderson Intelligencer reports on **May 8, 1915**, that *"through the kindness of Mr. B. F. McKellar all the horses that will be shipped to Greenwood for the firemen's tournament will be kept free of charge in the large stable on Maxwell Avenue. Heretofore fire departments have had to pay for stalls. The local firemen are very appreciative of Mr. McKellar's assistance."*

An interesting photograph is posted in the **May 17, 1915**, edition of the Greenwood Daily Journal, showing Greenwood's prized fire horse, *"Harry Thaw"*. The caption reads *"'Harry Thaw,' Greenwood's fire horse, as swift as Achilles."*

The next day's paper (Daily Journal), **May 18, 1915**, informs the reader that *"Assistant Fire Chief J. L. Gaffney was slightly hurt this morning when he missed his balance and fell in a practice run at the hydrant on Hampton Avenue. He was knocked unconscious but was soon at himself and will be in shape for the races tomorrow."*

The headlines and article in the Greenwood Daily Journal on **May 17, 1915**, are filled with excitement and details of the State Firemen's Convention being held in Greenwood over the next several days. *"STATE FIREMEN'S TOURNAMENT OPENS IN GREENWOOD TUESDAY."* The lengthy commentary talks about *"PROMINENT VISITORS WILL SPEAK AT COURT HOUSE"*, and a *"Grand Parade Will Take Place on Wednesday—Races Wednesday and Thursday—Many Visitors Will Arrive Tomorrow."* The article continues, *"With the arrival of 11 fire teams from the principal cities of South Carolina, the South Carolina Firemen's Association is ready to open its 11<sup>th</sup> annual convention in Greenwood on Tuesday. The first day will be devoted to welcome addresses and a business session and on Wednesday and Thursday the real events of interest to the public will be held including a spectacular street parade and the races on Hampton Avenue track. The teams here are: Darlington, Bishopville, Bennettsville, Marion, Abbeville, Sumter, Columbia, Rock Hill, Orangeburg, Union and Newberry."*

A few days later, Sumter's paper, The Watchman and Southron, remarked in their **May 22, 1915**, copy that *"GREENWOOD WELCOMES LADS,"* referring to visiting firemen. *"Two hundred visiting firemen were formally welcomed to Greenwood today for their 11<sup>th</sup> annual convention by welcome addresses of real feeling and cordiality. C. C. Featherstone spoke in behalf of Mayor A. S. Hartzog and city council and Henry C. Tillman for the Greenwood fire department. Both speakers were happy in their addresses. President Behrens of Charleston, Chief Laroque of Marion and J. D. McNeil of Fayetteville, N.C., were equally felicitous in their responses. Mr. McNeil was introduced as the father of the association. His efforts with the help of Chief Behrens and many others, brought the association into being on May 30, 1905. On a motion of A. E. Adams of the Greenwood fire department a telegram of sympathy was sent Gov. Manning."*

Apparently, the Greenwood Fire Department had performed so well over the last several years, especially in the various tournaments around the area, that a *“NEW FIRE HORSE”* was purchased. The Evening Index reports in the **August 19, 1915** edition that *“A new horse has been bought by the Greenwood Fire Department, to be worked with ‘Harry Thaw,’ the only other fire horse owned by the city. As a peculiarly fitting name, the new horse has been christened, ‘William Travers Jerome.’ A fine pair they make. The horse bought from Mr. A. B. Sample.”*

The Greenwood Daily Journal related that a *“FIRE DEMONSTRATION AT THE FAIR WEDNESDAY”* in the **October 18, 1915** issue. *“A special attraction of the Piedmont Fair on Wednesday afternoon at 5 o’clock will be a demonstration inside the grounds by the Greenwood Fire Department. Every member of the department will take part and the visitors to the Fair will have the opportunity of seeing how the local team fights flames. The new hook and ladder truck will be used to show the exciting features of handling a blaze with a 45-foot ladder.”*

On **December 23, 1915**, the Greenwood Daily Journal relates *“FIRE DEPARTMENT HAS ANNUAL BANQUET.”* *“The annual banquet of the Greenwood Fire Department was served at the Star Café last night. All members of the department, the City Council, city attorney, city clerk and treasurer and other guests enjoyed the feast of good things edible and wordable. There were 40 around the banquet board.”* A number of speakers followed the meal with glowing remarks about their firemen. *“They spoke eloquently of Greenwood as a ‘better place to live’ and the fire department as an invaluable asset toward making Greenwood such a place.”* Dr. E. J. Smith told the firemen that he endorsed *“a motor truck with pump attached. He voiced the sentiments of everyone present when he declared that the growing city should add to its fire department by the purchase of this modern apparatus.”*

Another year has passed, and the Greenwood Fire Department is gearing up for the upcoming Firemen's Tournament to be held in Orangeburg. The Evening Index, dated **June 23, 1916**, says *"The advance detachment of the Greenwood Fire Department left last Friday for Orangeburg for the State Firemen's Tournament. The Orangeburg Daily News stated Saturday that they were on the ground in the following notice...Greenwood and Marion have sent their teams equipped with tents. These two teams have pitched their tents in the vacant lot at the corner of South Railroad Avenue and Whitman streets. The Newberry and Laurens teams have quartered their horses at local stables. Messrs. W. A. Riley and J. L. Gaffney, of the Greenwood team, say that Harry K. Thaw is in fine trim for the racing events next week. They announce that a delegation of from 12 to 18 men will come to represent their town. They were armed with pennants and other decorations to let the folks know that they were in the city."*

The **July 6, 1916**, Evening Index shared *"The Greenwood Fire Department led by Harry K. Thaw, the fire horse that broke the state record in Orangeburg at the last Tournament, making the remarkable time in 28 1/5 seconds; driven by Chief Beaudrot. On the wagon were several firemen, all dressed in white. The Greenwood fire truck followed."*

The Greenwood Daily Journal on **July 21, 1916**, reports good news. *"Greenwood's fire truck, Mr. Huckaby states, will be shipped on September 1<sup>st</sup>. He was very much impressed with its mechanism and is sure the city has made the right purchase. He spent three days in the Seagrave factory."*

A well-deserved pat-on-the-back for the Greenwood firemen appeared in The Evening Index on **February 18, 1918**. A *"FINE PIECE OF WORK"* it says. The article states the *"The Greenwood Fire Department saved Leslie school building from the destruction by fire Saturday afternoon."*

*The school district would have to face today a serious financial loss but for the fire work of the men of the Greenwood Fire Department. The saving was more than the expenses of the department will be for several years. The trustees of the schools on behalf of the whole community wish to thank the men for their work. They deserve the grateful thanks of every citizen."*

The **May 6, 1918**, edition of The Evening Index paper announces two resignations from the fire department. *"Fire Chief Clarence B. Beaudrot has resigned as head of Greenwood's Fire Department and will leave at once for Clemson College where he will act as one of the instructors who are to teach the men sent there from difference counties by their Local Boards. Mr. Beaudrot has a contract for six months of this work and it may last longer. He feels that it would be best for the town to have a regular chief and has tendered his resignation."* Then, *"Mr. J. C. Foy, who has been with the Greenwood Fire Department for some time has resigned to accept a position with the Greenwood Auto & Supply Company. The Company has just moved into its big place on Maxwell Avenue. Mr. Foy has been driver of the big truck at the Fire Department."*

The Evening Index on **June 3, 1918**, reports that the *"ORPHANAGE LOSES BOYS HOME BY FIRE."* The narrative says, *"Fire, which it is supposed started from a defect of some kind in the flue, destroyed the Terrill Smith Home at Connie Maxwell Orphanage Saturday evening. The fire was discovered just a few minutes before six o'clock. It had made too great headway to be checked by the Orphanage folks and a call for the Greenwood fire department was turned in. The truck responded most promptly but no help could be given because the pipe which supplies the water out there was too small for the hose of the city fire department and Chief Joe Beaudrot could not make any connection at all."*

An announcement, again, in The Evening Index on **June 11, 1918**, states that *“Greenwood’s fire department is all motorized. Horse drawn trucks were discarded a number of years ago, having two up-to-date trucks. J. L. Beaudrot is chief of the department.”*

On **March 7, 1921**, The Index-Journal broadcasted that *“Messrs. W. A. Trammel, Charles Westomoland, W. S. Shook and R. J. Trammel, of Canton, N. C. are here today inspecting fire trucks of the Greenwood Fire Department with a view to purchasing similar equipment. Pumping demonstrations were given on the streets, water being thrown over the standpipe.”* And, another article mentions that *“W. C. Woodward, a member of the Augusta fire department, spent today here visiting friends at Greenwood fire department. Mr. Woodward declared the equipment here would rank with any he had seen.”*

A couple of months later, The index-Journal, on **May 16, 1921**, reports *“S. GREENWOOD FIRE CAUSES MUCH DAMAGE.”* Details are that *“Fire, which destroyed three stores at South Greenwood at midnight Saturday caused an estimated damage of five or six thousand dollars, partially covered by insurance, it was stated this morning. One store was owned by R. S. Hollingsworth, one by M. B. Ellenberg and the third, a shoe repair shop, by Walter Stewart. All were small wooden structures on the south side of the street, near the railroad. Although outside of the incorporate limits, the fire department rendered valuable service and kept the flames from spreading to the nearby buildings and residences. There were handicapped because their equipment would not fit the hydrants at South Greenwood. It is not known how the fire originated, having been discovered in the store of R. S. Hollingsworth. All three buildings were totally destroyed.”*

Just over a year has passed since any significant news about the fire department has showed up in print. However, on **June 12, 1922**, The Index-Journal tells that *“The interior of the building housing the*

*Greenwood fire department has recently been remodeled and additional floor space in the rear made available for parking of trucks. Trucks are now parked one behind the other instead of two abreast as formerly, eliminating danger in making a quick get-away. The unusual part of the remodeling is that all of the work was done by the members of the department themselves. Walls were ceiled and roof built that would have done credit to any carpenter. Firemen really do more than sit in the shade waiting for an alarm to come in."*

*"FIRE TEAM OFF TO ORANGEBURG" is the headline in the **June 15, 1923**, edition of The Index-Journal. It states "'Sporting Bill,' race horse of the Greenwood Fire Department, and a hose wagon were shipped to Orangeburg yesterday in charge of Eddie Kemp, to prepare for the annual firemen's tournament next week. Chief C. B. Beaudrot, Assistant Chief A. A. Duncan, R. H. Whitlock, J. S. Canfield, W. F. Terry, Fred Herring, Mack Turner, Jim Patterson and Red Owens will go to Orangeburg today. The local team will race for the Behren's trophy cup and for the \$200 purse. 'We are going to win; no doubt about that.' Chief Beaudrot said today."*

Well, eleven days later, there appears to be some controversy between the Greenwood firemen over their loss to the Orangeburg firemen as evidenced by an article in The Time and Democrat dated **June 26, 1923**. The headline reads, "**GREENWOOD FIRE DEPARTMENT LETTER NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY FIREMEN HERE.**" The editor states, "A letter has been received by Fire Chief Fisher from C. B. Beaudrot, Chief of the Greenwood fire department following the race for the South Carolina State Firemen's Association cup run here Wednesday. It was decided to invite the Orangeburg fire department to run another race with the Greenwood department each department to put up \$50, the winner take all. This letter followed the telegram received Friday morning stating that a protest would be made against the race run here. Newberry was suggested as the place to run another race."

The editor continues, *"It was thought that the Greenwood department to enter an official protest but the letter from Chief Beaudrot indicates that such is not to be done, but that department seems desirous of running another race. In this letter there are insinuations against the local racing team as to the water pressure and other things. Up to Monday night Fire Chief Fisher had made no reply to Chief Beaudrot's official let and he stated that he might make no reply.*

*The feeling of local firemen is that the race has been run, the judges made their decisions, the Greenwood Fire Chief and the remaining members of the racing team accepted the results and expressed satisfaction with the entire affair, the Orangeburg Fire Department won the cup fairly and squarely and they will not be inveigled (allured) into a further contest."*

The article concludes with the following: *"In view of the fact that the Greenwood firemen expressed entire satisfaction with the race, the local firemen are somewhat at a loss to understand just what influence is being brought to bear that would induce the form of protest and suggestion for another race contained in the letter. The tardiness with which the proceedings of the Greenwood firemen are characterized is also a mystery. However, the matter is not taken seriously here and local firemen are not worried."*

The Evening Index, dated **July 2, 1924**, shows a picture of *"GREENWOOD'S CRACK AUTO FIRE TRUCKS."* And, the caption reads, *"For 'Efficiency and Equipment' Ranks Fourth in the State, Says Chief Behrens."*

Then, on **October 7, 1924**, The Index-Journal headlines, *"A DEMONSTRATION BY LOCAL FIREMEN..." WILL BE STAGED THURSDAY AFTERNOON, FIRE PREVENTION DAY."* The article says *"members of the Greenwood Fire Department will give a practical demonstration of handling the city's fire apparatus Thursday afternoon between 3 and 4*

*o'clock. The demonstration is staged as an observance of Fire Prevention Day and it is hoped that all the citizens of Greenwood will witness it. The siren will sound promptly at 3 o'clock Thursday afternoon and the two trucks will dash out of the Department Building, one going down South Main street and the other up North Main street. They will be driven an equal distance from the square and then will return 'making time,' in both directions. A test will then be made of the water pressure on the square and short talks will be made on fire prevention by Chief Beaudrot and others. All pedestrians and automobile drivers are warned to go to the curbing immediately upon sounding of the siren and to remain there at least for five minutes."*

A surprise was bestowed on the firemen of the department and was reported on by The Index- Journal on **May 29, 1925**. "The \$50 check sent by the Gulf Refining Company to the Greenwood Fire Department will be divided among the individual firemen in accordance with the request of the Gulf people in a letter to S. S. Faulkner, local agent, which reads as follows:

*Dear Sir:*

*I am very much pleased to advise our management feel that they should recognize in some way the good work of the fire department in connection with our recent fire loss at your station—and I am attaching you herewith check for \$50, drawn to the order of the Chief of the Fire Department at Greenwood, which you will deliver to him with our very good wishes and with the explanation that this is an expression of our appreciation to the entire department, and is to be used by him for the benefit of the boys composing the department in Greenwood, in any manner they may see fit. Kindly advise me of the delivery of this check as outlined.*

*Very truly yours,*

*G. R. Wilby*

*Assist. District Sales Manager"*

Then, finally, a strange and funny story appeared in the **November 2, 1925** printing of The Index-Journal. The headline reads, *“BUYS REAL GROUNDHOG.”* It says, *“Walter Goldman of the Greenwood Fire Department has purchased a real groundhog, one of the kind that is raised in the mountains, and has it on exhibition at the City Hall. Mr. Goldman is determined to see for himself next February just what a groundhog does on Groundhog Day. The little animal was purchased from a mountain apple wagon.”*

Now, the rest of the history of the Greenwood Fire Department from 1925 to the present is up to others to complete...that's 95 years of stories to put to pen. It is this writer's hope that someone will take the challenge and catch up this department's rich heritage, and keep our legacy alive.

Carter H. Jones  
Special Projects Coordinator and Historian  
S. C. State Firefighters' Association  
July 2020

