

Bennettsville Fire Department “The First Hundred Years”

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The story of Bennettsville and the evolution of fire protection in this community dates back to December 14, 1819, in an area of northeastern South Carolina near the Great Pee Dee River. The settlement was named for Thomas Bennett, Jr., who was governor of the State at the time. Cotton was becoming an essential crop in those days and was dependent on enslaved African-Americans to cultivate the crops. The advancement of technology brought the cotton gin to the area to process the crops. The development of large cotton plantations brought a significant growth in population settling in the area.

During those early days a courthouse, designed by South Carolina architect Robert Mills, was constructed with streets eventually radiating from the square where mostly wooden stores, businesses, three churches and about thirty houses were erected. Along with a growing business district, other commercial enterprises, a school and churches soon sprang up. In 1885, a businessman, Duncan Donald McColl, is known to have financed the first railroad, bank and some textile operations.

Early records tell us that the settlement developed into one of the most productive agricultural communities in the state. But, while it was a growing population, it’s history is also recognized as being occupied by divisions of the Union army in 1865. General William T. Sherman occupied the courthouse for his headquarters for a time

and amazingly allowed it to remain intact, unlike so many other courthouses in the state which were burned.

As the community grew in population, especially after the Civil War, Bennettsville was like most villages and towns of that era which suffered from the frequent and frightful visits from “the fire fiend,” “the devouring element,” or “the fire king.” The author, Nancy Backs said, “Americans had for many years helplessly watched their little wooden towns burn and be rebuilt and burn again.” Recorded history reveals that Bennettsville was certainly no different, and out of necessity, the occurrence of unwanted fires brought attention to the need to better safeguard the citizens and properties from the ravages of fire.

Based on the history of other sister communities in and around Bennettsville, it is this writer’s belief that the growing village most likely had a sizable group of untrained and disorganized citizen volunteers who could be counted on to turn out at the alarm of fire to do what they could to subdue a fire with tools that were available. If they found themselves unable to extinguish a blaze, they assumed the role of a salvage company risking life and limb to remove the contents from a burning structure. Of course, in their haste to remove more delicate pieces of furniture, china, linens, and paintings, the contents were more likely damaged or wrecked beyond repair.

This writer is of the opinion that it is safe to assume that a number of businessmen like Duncan McColl, Dr. Alexander McLeod, Edward Crosland, and General John McQueen thought about the threat of fire and the need to protect their investments. These men were very committed to helping this new community grow and prosper. Most assuredly these stakeholders made provisions for the early extinguishment of accidental and even incendiary fires. Without

much doubt the citizens were provided, or asked to make available, ladders, buckets, blankets and other sorts of simple tools for putting out fires until more advanced methods could be obtained. However, the threat of unwanted fires was an ever present and often devastating reality.

For example, The Charleston Mercury newspaper of **March 17, 1859**, printed *“We regret to learn a disastrous fire occurred at Bennettsville yesterday. It broke out about twelve o’clock in the kitchen of Mr. Townsend, and consumed the kitchen and smoke house, and also the kitchen and smokehouse of Mr. Douglass, and several other outbuildings. It was subdued about three o’clock. The business of the Court was suspended.”*

Yet another fire reported in the same newspaper on **March 30, 1860** said *“On Wednesday of last week, between 11 and 12 o’clock, the Female Academy, in this place, took fire from a spark in the roof, and the alarm given by the school girls soon collected most of the villagers. Fortunately, several very active and intelligent servants working in the immediate neighborhood, instantly rushed to the point of danger, and notwithstanding the wind blowing furiously, the fire was soon extinguished, with but little damage to the building.*

The article continues, *“In the afternoon of the same day, Dr. Crosland’s blacksmith shop took fire from a spark, and in less than ten minutes had progressed so rapidly that no attempt was made to save it. Fortunately, quite a number of the field hands belonging to the Doctor were near by, and these, with the prompt assistance of neighboring servants, under Dr. Crosland’s judicious direction, saved everything of value in the shop. Most of the villagers had by this time collected with buckets, pails, etc. for the security of the other buildings on the lot, except the gin house, which was too far off to take fire.”* **Note: This is first mention this writer has found**

describing the methods used in those early days of fire protection evolution in the village of Bennettsville.

Many small towns in the 19th Century utilized very primitive means to extinguish fires, ie. buckets of water, wet blankets, axes, shovels, rakes, ladders and various other limited techniques...even pine tops to stop the spread of woods or brush fires. Before church bells were afforded and erected, the alarm of fire was sounded by crude but very effective measures...firing shots into the air from a pistol, shotgun or rifle which quickly got the attention of neighbors and signaled something was amiss. As church bells became common, the town's people would employ the constant ringing of the bells to alert the citizens of a fire or other emergency in the area.

This writer will attempt to capture the rich history of the fire department that is available in order to expand on the struggles, leadership, major challenges, and progression of the Bennettsville Fire Department. The history provided in these pages are mostly taken verbatim from various newspapers, local archives, Sanborn Maps, and other resources.

The **March 28, 1866** edition of The Daily Phoenix found where *“The dwelling house of Major B. D. Townsend, in Bennettsville, Marlboro District, was consumed by fire on the 9th inst. Furniture, clothing and valuables saved.”*

The Daily Phoenix of Columbia posted on **December 1, 1866** activities of South Carolina House of Representatives. Among the items of business taken up dealing with Bennettsville was *“Mr. Townsend introduced a bill incorporate the village of Bennettsville.”*

The Daily Phoenix newspaper of Columbia posted on **March 1, 1871**, that *“On Thursday night last, the dwelling of Mr. Wm. D. Rowe,*

nearly opposite the Baptist Church, took fire and was burned down. Most of the furniture was saved, but the building, which was a valuable one, was consumed. The fire was accidental.

Also, in the same article, there appeared the notice of another fire near Bennettsville about the same time. *“The colored church at Society Hill, Darlington County, was destroyed by an incendiary fire, on Friday morning last. The general impression is that the work was done by dissatisfied members of the congregation.”*

The Yorkville Enquirer printed on **October 15, 1874** that *“The gin house and cotton screw of Dr. J. Beatty Jennings, near Bennettsville, was destroyed by an incendiary fire on Sunday morning of last week. The loss is put down at \$2,000.”*

According to research found by retired Bennettsville Fire Chief Dixon Odom from the **June 1886** minutes of the Town Council, a committee was appointed to meet with the Fire Chief of Darlington and Charlotte Fire Departments to discuss the costs involved with installing cisterns or fire wells for the town. Then, Chief Odom found in the **March 1887** council minutes, mention of the town having dug a fire well at the Public Square. Additionally, a comment is made about *“collecting names for a Hook and Ladder Company.”*

Further research by Chief Odom found in the **April 1887** minutes the following announcement: *“Alderman McCall moved to have the lower portion of the Temperance Hall to store the equipment of the Hook and Ladder Co. A resolution was adopted for Alderman McLean for his work in negotiating the purchase of the Hook and Ladder Co. equipment and for using his hall to house the equipment.”* Chief Odom’s research further confirmed that *“Now give the town some defenses against fire with equipment which*

mainly consisted of hooks, ladders, axes and buckets which the fire company along with the townspeople could form bucket brigades.”

Note: In this writer’s opinion, the above two articles give significant weight and confidence that the establishment of the Bennettsville Fire Department took place in 1887. Over the next couple of decades the department required periodic adjustments which brought about several “reorganizations” with new leadership who were challenged to foster morale and a more professional approach to the science of firefighting. As you will read further in this history, the department really got going in 1911 when the business people demanded better fire protection.

The Yorkville Enquirer printed an edition of the paper on **November 22, 1893** that said, *“Several buildings, including Judge J. H. Hudson’s law office, were destroyed by fire at Bennettsville, last Thursday. The total loss was about \$4,000. Judge Hudson’s loss was fully covered by insurance.”*

The Manning Times of **May 22, 1895** wrote about a fire which occurred several days earlier: *“The smoldering ruins of seven of Bennettsville’s principal places of business, all of them handsome brick structures, is all that remains of the largest fire in the history of the town. About half past one o’clock yesterday the alarm was given and in less than three hours \$30,000 worth of property was in ashes. The fire commenced in the second story of Mr. H. W. Carroll’s handsome jewelry store at Darlington street, and in a short while the whole block was in a blaze. It became evident that the only hope of saving much property in the west end of the town was, if possible, to stop the fire at Mr. J. M. Jackson’s store. The building was soon covered with men ready to fight the fiery demon. Too much cannot be said in praise of the men who thus bravely fought the flames, especially when it is remembered that the town has no water works*

facilities, no fire engine, not even a hand engine. There is no doubt in the minds of the majority that the fire was incendiary.”

Chief Odom’s research reveals that on **May 20, 1895** that “*Council was concerned about walls standing from the fire as being a danger to the citizens. The building belonged to A. J. Rowe, P. A. McKellar and Simon Strauss...the building to be torn down at once.*”

This writer researched the archives of The Sanborn Maps of New York to find information about fire protection for the town. The **November 1895** inspection of the town discovered Bennettsville had a population of 1,500 people, poor water facilities (wells), and “*1 Hook & Ladder truck.*” **Note: The Sanborn Map Co. (est. 1967) provided detailed maps of towns and cities in order to help insurance companies better evaluate risks of insuring properties. These maps always included information about construction methods, fire protection capabilities (if any) and water availability. Also mentioned in this early inspection is a hook & ladder truck. Most small communities possessed an unsophisticated hand-drawn wagon of some sort equipped with a ladder, ropes, axes, shovels, pike pole, blankets for wetting, and maybe a soda acid fire extinguisher. This apparatus was stored in a building on the property of the Court House sharing space with a market on Church Street and North Street.**

The Birmingham News noted on **December 30, 1895** that “*This morning at 1 o’clock fire broke out in the Rogers Hotel,*” and spreading, it says, to Mrs. Legg’s store, Mr. John S. Moore’s furniture Store, and the drug store.

The Yorkville Enquirer, of **May 29, 1897**, wrote “*The barn and stables of Mr. George Crossland, a brother-in-law of Senator McLaurin, near Bennettsville, was destroyed by an incendiary fire, last Tuesday. In*

the stables there were 60 head of stock, all of which were consumed.”

On **October 13, 1897**, The Lancaster News reported that *“Fire occurred at 3:20 today destroying six frame buildings of Col. C. S. McCall and two of James E. Cox and the property of occupants in these cases. Estimated losses, \$12,000.”*

From The Statesville Record and Landmark printed on **March 1, 1898**, a story of interest and uncommon bravery. *“Engineman Henry Hammond, of the Charleston, Sumter and Northern Railroad, is at his home in Bennettsville dangerously burned. He ran a race against a fire on the tender of his locomotive, which was piled high with pine and lightwood. When six miles from Bennettsville, fire was discovered in the wood and it was then beyond the control of the crew with the means at hand. So, the engineman opened the throttle wide and made a dash for the town. But the fire burning at the door of the cab was too hot, and he and the fireman crawled out the window to the footboard, clinging there while the train dashed along.”*

The article continues, *“The increased wind fanned the fire to furnace heat. The crew were safe until they neared the town, when the train had to be stopped. The cab was now on fire, but the fire had to be faced. The road’s end was at hand and a smashup on the terminus was inevitable unless steam was shut off and the brakes were put on. Engineman Hammond did these things and then the fireman dragged him out through the cab window. He was sent to his house.”*

The County Record of Kingstree wrote a brief article on **July 14, 1898** about a fire in Bennettsville. *“Considerable losses were caused by a fire in Bennettsville and McColl on Friday last. Amount of coverage by insurance small in comparison with losses.”*

The State newspaper printed on **February 1, 1899** that *“Yesterday morning the store and contents of W. B. Adams & Co., in Adamsville, was entirely destroyed by fire. Loss about \$5,000, fully covered by insurance. This morning about 5 o’clock the dwelling of J. Frank Breeden, with office, smokehouse and contents, was burned. But little furniture was saved. The origin of both fires is unknown.”*

A review of the Sanborn Map Co. inspection of Bennettsville in **July 1901** reveals that a hook & ladder truck was still owned by the town. The only additional information available indicates the town’s water facilities were *“not good,” “no steam or hand engines,”* or *“independent hose carts.”* The population of the town at the time of the inspection was around 2,000 people.

The Marlboro Democrat, dated **May 1, 1903**, reported *“On Tuesday evening last about 6 o’clock the large barn, stables and shelter at Mr. W. W. Pate’s in West Bennettsville were burned together with about 10 bushels corn, lot of meal, peas and 500 lbs. of forage, and about 50 gallons of molasses. Just how the fire started in not yet known. The family were away until after the fire started. The barn and stable were the property of Mr. T. L. Crosland, who has some insurance.”*

“Costly Fire In Bennettsville,” read the caption in The State newspaper on **May 28, 1903**. *“The Pee Dee Novelty Works and Machine shops, owned and operated by W. P. Breeden, Jr., was totally destroyed by fire last night. The loss is fully \$6,000, and Mr. Breeden did not have a dollar of insurance. The shavings, chip, etc., and the lumber stored in and around the low flat buildings made the fire burn very rapidly, and the whole of east Bennettsville was brilliantly lighted by the great blazing mass that rolled and leaped into the air. Although the alarm was given by a locomotive that stood on the railroad track near by as soon as the flames burst through the*

building, it was impossible to stop the fire or save any of the machinery. It was supposed that the fire started from the boiler.”

On **December 9, 1904**, The State newspaper circulated that *“The brick residence at the corner of Darlington and Parsonage streets, owned by B. E. Moore and occupied by F. R. Crosland, was burned tonight. The fire caught from the kitchen stove flue. The contents of the house were saved except in the kitchen and dining room. In the latter several hundred dollars worth of old silverware, given to Mrs. Crosland by her mother, Mrs. Martin of Baltimore and greatly prized.”*

The Marlboro Democrat, printed on **March 4, 1904**, stated *“The colored Grade School building located in the South east corner of the town in the grove near Joe McCollum’s, was burned Friday afternoon about 3:30. The cause was a defective stove flue and the use of fat lightwood. The building was comparatively new and cost about \$800.”*

The Savannah Morning News noted briefly on **May 3, 1904** that *“Fire destroyed the Bennettsville Drug Company’s store and contents, resulting in a loss of \$7,000.”*

The **January 27, 1905** printing of The Marlboro Democrat told of another loss to farmers. *“On Wednesday a few minutes after 1 o’clock, the large ginnery building at the Bennettsville Oil Mill was discovered on fire. A large crowd soon collected, but it was soon seen that all efforts to stop its progress were futile with a strong westerly wind blowing directly for the other buildings near by. The buildings were made of the best pine lumber, and the fire was so hot that little could be accomplished with the water works or in the work of stopping the fire on the premises. The origin of the fire is not definitely known, but it was the largest it was the largest ever witnessed in our town. At times it was feared the Coast Line Freight*

Depot and other property adjacent would go, but heroic efforts confined it to the Oil Mill premises.”

On **February 2, 1905**, The Goldsboro Weekly Argus reported “*The Southern Cotton Oil Company’s plant at Bennettsville was destroyed by fire. Loss of about \$100,000, partially covered by insurance. About 2,000 tons of cotton seed meal and a quantity of oil was destroyed.*”

The **October 6, 1905** edition of The Shelby County Democrat published an account of a serious fire in Bennettsville which occurred on September 29, 1905. “*The business blocks of the public square were consumed by fire with the exception of the Planters’ Bank building which was due to the building being made of brick and heroic efforts by the townspeople. The loss will aggregate about \$100,000. The buildings burned included the post office, which was of wood; a large brick building occupied by W. H. Breeden as a harness and buggy store, the Excelsior Hardware company and Weatherly dry goods store.*” According to Chief Odom, “*the fire started between 5:00 and 6:00 o’clock in the evening and was caused by a gasoline brazier exploding in the bicycle shop of S. J. Pearson.*

Again, Chief Odom’s research discovered that “*The 1905 fire prompted the Town Council to approve the purchase of a fire engine and on **February 19, 1906**, Council ordered a fire engine from the Howe Fire Engine Co. of Indianapolis, Indiana. On **March 15, 1906**, Mr. P. G. Howe came with the engine to make several tests. While it was a chemical engine, it was also a water engine. The pump was driven by a gasoline motor and was horse drawn. The test included throwing water on the Court House steeple which, at that time, stood ninety feet tall. All tests were successful and the cost of the engine was \$800.00. The engine was housed at Mr. W. D. Moore’s*

stable for \$3.00 a month.” The research article continues, *“There were still no water works and the engine relied on water from wells and water troughs.”* Although the town had a fire engine, there was still no “officially” organized fire department.

On **April 10, 1906**, The State paper printed a shocking story that caused some embarrassment to the town’s leaders. *“Yesterday morning, between 1 and 2 o’clock, fire consumed the barns and stables of Throop Crosland, J. L. Knight and Mrs. Belle I. Emanuel, on Fayetteville avenue and Everett street. The origin of the fire is unknown. The barns and stables of the three adjoining lots were in close proximity to each other, and the bucket brigade could not save any of them. Nobody seemed to think of the new fire engine until it was too late. This is the second fire that has occurred since the engine arrived, and it has not been carried to either. A citizen remarked that at least a day’s notice should be given when the use of the engine is needed.”*

Another inspection was made by the Sanborn Map Co. in **November 1906** which provided some progress with the town’s fire protection. The only water supply available to fight fire was from *“private wells,”* and there was *“one hand brake engine with a 60 gallon tank kept filled with chemicals.”* **Note: A good description of the fire engine was made earlier, but better picture of the apparatus is needed. It was a horse-drawn wagon which had a gasoline pump to deliver several streams of water if an adequate supply of water were available. Additionally, the wagon also had a 60 gallon tank filled with a mixture of water and baking soda. When the tank was rotated, a flask of sulfuric acid would blend and create pressure to discharge the contents to create an effective stream of water. This was the early version of what we know today as the Booster tank carried on all fire engines today. Back in those days, if the apparatus could arrive on the scene of a fire in its**

early phases of burning, the fire could be quickly controlled and extinguished...very effective if used properly.

Additionally, the inspection noted that “*volunteer firemen practically organized.*” The population of Bennettsville was approximately 3,000. There is no mention of the town having a hook & ladder truck as noted in the 1901 inspection.

The Edgefield Advertiser on **September 4, 1907** related that “*The barns and stable belonging to Mr. H. W. Corral were burned Thursday evening. The alarm was given at about 6:15 o’clock and a large crowd soon gathered. For a few minutes it seemed that Bennettsville Hardware company’s store and the Bank of Marlboro would be destroyed, but hard work by the fire department assisted by many other men extinguished the burning store and prevented the spreading fire.*”

The **January 29, 1908** edition of The Edgefield Examiner noted that “*A \$100,000 fire occurred at Bennettsville Friday morning (the 24th), wiping out the principal business section and many of the best residences. The town is practically without fire protection and it was impossible to check the flames. The fire started in the big Skye Hotel, where there were many narrow escapes from death. Col. J. J. Heckart, president of the Bennettsville & Cheraw Railroad, saved his life by jumping from a window, sustaining a broken leg.*”

Another article about the above fire was printed in The Beaufort Gazette and noted in their **February 6, 1908** edition of the paper that “*The entire business section and many fine residences were destroyed by the big fire at Bennettsville. The total estimated lose is over \$100,000. The fire started in the Skye Hotel. A high wind fanned the flames until the entire block was in ashes. The town is without*

fire fighting apparatus.” **Note: The town did have a fire engine but proved ineffective without an adequate water supply.**

“REID & CO’S STORE BURNED TO GROUND...Second Fire Within Six Weeks,” read the caption in the **March 6, 1908** printing of The Marlboro Democrat. *“Another fire visited Bennettsville yesterday morning making the second within six weeks time. At about 8 o’clock fire was discovered between the ceiling and the floor of the second story of the building occupied by Reid & Co. The fire was sometime getting a start but once it got under way the whole building soon went up. As on the occasion of the last fire the bucket brigade rendered excellent service in fighting the flames.”* **Note: The article makes a statement which is confusing to this writer...it says “The sprinkler was on hand and the hand engine was kept busy.”**

The State newspaper on **May 20, 1908** published notice of a potentially disastrous fire in Bennettsville. *“What might have been a very disastrous fire broke out in the telegraph office of the Atlantic Coast Line Railway company here this morning at 6:30 o’clock. The fire originated at the switch board and is supposed to have been caused by some heavily charged circuit coming in contact with the Western Union wires in some distant city. Telegraphic communication was cut off for a few hours but was restored as speedily as possible. The burning of a hole in the end of the office and destroying some records was the extent of the damage so far as is known now. The fire broke out just as the Sumter train was leaving the station and was immediately discovered by the employees on duty and a few bystanders who did some good work with the ever ready fire buckets and well filled barrels which the Coast Line at all times keeps in place. The Coast Line depot is situated in the heart of the wholesale district and had the fire occurred earlier in the morning Bennettsville would have had another reminder that waterworks and a fire department are still needed.”*

Chief Odom's research discovered that on **June 3, 1908**, that the Town Council *"appointed Thomas Sparks, Chief and T. C. Crosland, Assistant Chief."*

According to Chief Odom, in **August of 1908**, a *"Contract to build water works-six miles of water mains and fire hydrants. Water free to Court House."* And, on **September 30, 1908**, the Town *"Bought 1,000 feet of hose, 1 reel, 4 nozzles @ \$880.00."*

It is known that many communities of the day utilized the shooting of pistols, rifles and shotguns in the air to alert the town's people of a fire. However, an article found in The Columbia Record on **May 24, 1909** demonstrated that this practice was carried to an extreme in Bennettsville. *"Writing in the Pee Dee Advocate, Mr. J. P. Gibson, Sr., protests against the amount of pistol-shooting and other disorderly conduct that accompanies every fire in Bennettsville. He writes, "A good many citizens living in the city of Bennettsville would gladly receive the comforting information that our city fathers had passed an ordinance, with instructions and authority delegated to the policemen to enforce same, that in case of a fire in the town any promiscuous shooting by anyone, generally indulged in by boys be forbidden, and violators severely punished."*

The article continues, *"The outrageous and abominable custom, which for many years has prevailed in this city, whenever a fire, small or large, occurs within two miles of the court house, these hip pocket pistol 'toters,' violators of law, uncover their guns and begin to 'shoot up the town.' The negro boys in crowds run down the streets and give vent to such yells and shrieks almost sufficient to wake the dead, alarming nervous women, and endangering the lives of sick people who are very weak and extremely ill. There has never been any need for such uncivilized conduct, and certainly our*

advancement towards city proportions should prohibit such practices at the present.”

More follows...”Long after everyone within two miles of the fire had been aroused and further alarm absolutely unnecessary. I would suggest that a fire alarm be established by ringing of bells, or other methods to notify the citizens of a fire and that the present practice be prohibited and made a misdemeanor.”

The State published an article in the **July 2, 1909** edition of the paper which references a fire and a letter written by Mr. E. J. Sawyer, an African-American, in appreciation for the new Bennettsville waterworks and fire department. In part, the article says *“It is rather singular that a citizen who had little to do with the establishment of waterworks should be the first beneficiary. The colored people of Bennettsville have always, when occasion offered, worked hard to save the property of the white people from fire, and the opportunity was offered, at this last fire, for the white people to show their willingness to do all in their power to assist the colored man. The work of the white firemen and others has brought forth a letter to the Pee Dee Advocate, of which does the writer of that letter honor, and will doubtless be productive of good.”*

The letter reads, *“Mr. Editor: Kindly allow me space in your appreciated columns to thank all, white and colored, who assisted in saving my property from total destruction by fire last week. But for the unselfish and patriotic conduct, timely and heroic services and our excellent waterworks, the whole of my brick block might have been destroyed, causing me a personal loss of several thousand dollars, and the city both financial and aesthetic losses which it can ill afford at this time. From a heart swelling with grateful emotions, and a deep sense of obligation, I thank each and every one and wish to assure all that it will be my pleasure as opportunity may be*

presented to demonstrate in a substantial manner the sincerity of my appreciation and gratitude for their kind and valuable assistance.”

The article continues with significant words of wisdom from the writer: *“If I have not already consumed too much of your valuable space, I would like to add, that to me, at least, the recent fire showed two things very clearly: 1) That the city acted wisely in securing waterworks and that with a properly organized fire company composed of such men as the daring and brave chief, Mr. Thomas Sparks, and others, who assisted him in the fight against the flames, Bennettsville nee have no fear of such destructive conflagrations as she has experienced in recent years. Who does not remember how we then had to stand helpless, hopeless and almost breathless, while the angry flames licked up thousands of hard earned dollars worth of property and left the most handsome portion of our beautiful city in black and abject ruins. Thanks to the wisdom and energy of our progressive citizens this sad picture need never be witnessed in Bennettsville again.”*

“2) That the white people of Bennettsville will work as hard and brave at many dangers to save a colored man’s property from fire as any other property. I am almost ashamed for calling attention to this color question, but so much is being said and written about the oppression and hardship of the negro in the South that I can not resist the temptation to break the monotonous hobby by putting on record this instance of friendship and sympathy of the whites for one of my color. This is not an isolated case, it illustrates the general rule, not the exception in this county and State.”

In conclusion, Mr. Sawyer says, *“I have always claimed with voice and pen that the industrious, considerate, self-respecting negro has as true and good white friends in South Carolina as can be found in*

any State in the Union, and that his enjoyment of life, liberty and property is as secure in the South as anywhere in the world. Of the correctness of the contention, I am more thoroughly convinced now than ever.”
“E. J. Sawyer.”

On **July 6, 1909**, the “Town bought a fire bell-size 42” in diameter-for \$74.00 F.O.B.” **Note: There is no mention when the fire bell was delivered. But, the complaint made by Mr. Gibson earlier regarding the dangers of shooting pistols in the air during a fire surely must have prompted the Town Council to improve methods of alerting citizens of a fire.**

On **January 13, 1910**, the “Town to look into building a fire house as close as possible to the center of town.” Then, on **March 9, 1910**, the Town “Bought a hose wagon-500’ of hose @ \$1.00 per foot and \$800.00 for the wagon.” And, on **October 10, 1910**, “The Town placed the fire wagon into service at Crosland’s stable. Crosland was to furnish a horse and go to all fires.”

Retired Chief Odom discovered in his research dated **August 1911**, that a “Petition from town businessmen for town to organize a fire department. City to build a stable, buy two horses, have a man to stay at fire department overnight. P. K. Meekins-Chief of organized department.” Other information discovered “The headquarters of the Fire Department were on what was then called Darlington St. between Dr. Townsend’s office and Matheson’s garage. The purchase of a horse and other equipment including a drop harness, fire boots, hats and rubber coats were also approved at this time.” **Note: There is some confusion over who was Chief. In 1911 W. P. Breeden served as Chief, and in 1914, P. Kirksey Meekins was elected Chief (Mr. Meekins died in July of 1960 at age of 73).**

The Dillon Herald of **October 12, 1911** that *“Jesse Rogers, a young boy, about 18 years old, is charged with setting fire to the residence of Mr. C. P. Hodges, in Bennettsville, last night, about 8:30 o’clock. Rogers is in jail here. The fire was detected by the children of Mr. Hodges and it was put out at once.”*

Again, this writer sought information from the Sanborn Map Co. inspection in **November 1912** to determine if there had been improvements to the town’s fire protection since their last survey. The inspection revealed that the town had *“22 volunteer men, 1 horse, a Hand engine (obsolete), reel & 250’ 2 ½” hose, chemical wagon & 500’ 2 ½” hose, Ladder truck, 1 man on days, 1 man on nights (paid).”* Additionally, the streets in town were not paved; public electric lights were available; and the town had a night watchman. The fire house was located near the intersection of Darlington and Parsonage Streets... a half block from Court House.

According to the above survey, the waterworks consisted of the following: *“Pump house equipped with two Worthington F.P.’s capacity. 750 gals. each.-1 pump draws from 8 drilled wells & fills 300,000 gal. reservoir, other pump draws from reservoir & fills 100,000 gal. tank 153’ high on Court House Square. 7 miles 4”, 6”, & 10” cast iron mains & 73 double hydrants, laid 1909. System of hydrants supplied by tank, but can be supplied by direct pumping. Daily consumption not metered.”* The population of Bennettsville remained about 3,000.

The **January 9, 1913** edition of The Bamberg Herald noted *“The building occupied by the Western Union Telegraph Company and the Dixie Café was burned last night (Jan. 5th). The origin of the fire is unknown, but it is supposed to have started near the café’s stove flue. The entire block, made up of the handsomest buildings in town, was in imminent danger, but the splendid work of the fire*

department held the losses down. This block was swept b fire a few years ago. The fire at that time started within a few feet of where the fire started last night.

The Columbia Record reported on **January 14, 1914** “*The Bennettsville fire department held a special meeting Monday night for the purpose of electing a chief in the place of Chief W. P. Breeden, Jr., who has moved to Darlington. P. Kirksey Meekins, assistant chief, was unanimously elected chief. Each of the other officers were advanced, which makes Earl Grist, assistant chief, and Leon Strauss, captain, Walter McRae was elected to fill the vacant office of lieutenant. Three new members wee elected—F. C. Moore, S. L. Freeman and Raymond Pearson. Several other minor points of interest were brought up and discussed. The town has bought some helmets, coats and boots to add to the equipment of the company.*”

On **October 1, 1914**, the “*Town hired first man to stay at fire department and care for the horses.*” Then, on **November 10, 1914**, the Town “*Bought another set of horses-fire house.*”

The Spanish flu of 1918 is considered the world’s deadliest flu pandemic. It is said that “*No matter what they called it, the virus attacked everyone similarly. It started like any other influenza case, with a sore throat, chills and fever. Then came the deadly twist: the virus ravaged its victim’s lungs.*” All of South Carolina was impacted including Marlboro County. Bennettsville was particularly hard hit. According to an article printed in The Bamberg Herald on **December 26, 1918**, “*The influenza epidemic is assuming alarming proportions in Bennettsville. Six hundred and eighty-three cases of influenza, 12 pneumonia and one death*” occurred in a short period of time.

In the **January 23, 1919** printing of The Dillon Herald, the Editor shared about a visit to Bennettsville by the Editor of the Yorkville

Enquirer. *“Bennettsville has suffered terribly from the influenza. I did not get the exact figures, but I was told that there was not a family in town that had not lost either a member or a close relative.”*

The News and Record of **April 22, 1919** tells that *“The Atlantic Coast Line Freight Depot, eight cars and cotton platform were destroyed by fire here today with 700 bales of cotton. The loss was estimated at \$150,000. Nearly all the cotton was insured.”*

Research of the minutes of Council reveal that *“Horses were used exclusively until the City bought its first motorized engine in **November 8, 1919**. This was an American LaFrance chain driven truck.*

In **July 1920**, the Sanborn Map Co. listed the town’s population about 4,500 people; the streets were still not paved, and there were two night police officers on duty. The fire department was comprised of *“One paid man on duty day and night, volunteer company of 25 men. One American-LaFrance motor triple combination pump, chemical and hose, 750 gal. pump, 40 gal. chemical tank and one 30 ft. extension ladder. One hose wagon and one hose jumper (hose reel) in reserve. 3,500 ft. of 2 ½” hose in good condition.”* **Note: It appears the water works had not changed from the 1912 inspection.**

The Dillon Herald, printed on **September 22, 1921**, that *“Much excitement was caused in the city Sunday afternoon when the automobile of J. B. Maxwell, well known man of Bennettsville, caught fire on Broad street, directly in front of the court house. The fire blazed merrily for a few minutes, but was extinguished by chemicals before the car was greatly damaged. The fire was the first in several weeks for Bennettsville, which is said to have one of the best fire records in the state.”*

The Watchman and Southron of Sumter captioned on **February 1, 1922** a fire which took place in Clio killing a man. *“Fire near noon today destroyed business establishments in Clio and entailed a loss of approximately \$125,000. A tragedy in connection with the fire was the death of R. D. Quick, who collided with a truck as he dashed to safety from a falling wall and was killed almost instantly. Just how the fire originated is not known. The first evidences of it were in the Blackman & McInnis Drug store about 11:30 o’clock and for more than two hours it raged. The fire department from Bennettsville came to the rescue and rendered much assistance.”*

An article in The State newspaper on **January 14, 1926**, reveals that R. B. Kirkwood was Chief of the Bennettsville department and served on the Legislative Committee of the State Firemen’s Association. At the time the committee was working on a Bill which would require *“That all hospitals and schools in towns having a central fire alarm station be equipped with fire alarm boxes.”*

The subtitle in The State paper on **July 3, 1927** read *“Bennettsville Firemen Enjoy Trip To Beach.”* Apparently, the fire department took the guidelines of the Firemen’s Fund (1% money) very carelessly and liberally where it stipulates “for the collective benefit” of the firemen in the department. According to the newspaper account *“The members of the Bennettsville fire department left Saturday night for Wrightsville beach, where they will enjoy a week’s vacation. While at the beach they will stay at the Oceanic hotel. This is the annual affair for the boys of the fire department. The citizens here are proud of the efficient fire department, which is composed of purely volunteers, who receive little compensation for their services.”*

The article continues, *“The officers of the department are: Chief R. B. Kirkwood; assistant chief, E. W. Breeden, Jr.; secretary and*

treasurer, O'Neil Kirkwood. The other members are E. Gray Craven, H. S. Covington, John E. Coxe, C. A. Maultsby, Frank Townsend, Leon Strauss, J. P. Gibson, E. H. Mackey, J. E. Weatherly, Paul Morrison, W. S. Mowry, Willie Jennings, C. L. McCormack and Ralph Morrison. While these active members are out of town, the former members have been requested to respond to an alarm that might be given. The truck driver, Breeden Copeland, will remain here."

"**BENNETTSVILLE BLAZE LEAVES LARGE DAMAGE,**" read the caption of the **March 4, 1929** edition of The Columbia Record. "Fire discovered at 5 o'clock this morning in the two-story brick building owned by Mrs. Annie Mowry, in the center of a block in the heart of the business section, in East Main street, did considerable damage to the building, stock and equipment of lessees. The Wilson Electric company, dealers in radios and Frigidaires, suffered loss from smoke and water, and the Sanitary café was badly damaged from the same causes. The floor to second story and roof of the building, for the most part, were burned. The McColl fire department generously came to the aid, but one of the most stubborn fires in the city's history was under control at 8 o'clock, when the ladies of that town arrived."

The same paper noted still another fire on the 3rd (Sunday). "At 1 o'clock, fire destroyed the brooder house of Matheson Shelton, in Livingston avenue, in a residence section, and four hundred young chicks were burned. The fire company prevented a spread to other buildings."

The **July 12, 1929** edition of The State newspaper, announced "At a meeting of city council last night it was ordered that the local firemen be protected with accident insurance in the sum of \$2,000, each. A blanket policy through a local agency has been placed. The protection on the group of eighteen firemen provides a coverage in

accidents resulting in going to, while fighting and returning from fires.”

The Sunday Record of Columbia printed on **July 28, 1929** that *“Fire, smoke and water at four-thirty this morning brought considerable damage to the two-story building and contents facing on the public square owned by Mrs. Ellen L. Carlisle and occupied on the ground floor by the Sarah Jane Tea Room, owned by Mr. L. R. Kirkpatrick. The fire department responded promptly and did efficient work. The origin is thought to have been from a defective wire. Kit Spears occupied a room on the second story and was awakened by fumes and smoke. He hastily left the building and gave the alarm.”*

According to the **September 16, 1929** printing of The State, *“At a meeting of city council the decision was reached as given out today to purchase a new Seagrave fire truck with a 500-gallon pump to \$500. This has been under contemplation for sometime, the growth of the city making more adequate equipment necessary. The truck now in use is very good and has taken care of the demands but to further safeguard the community and to bring the equipment up to a better standard, it was deemed wise to add the above additional equipment. The council meeting was held on return of the following officials and firemen who took a trip through North Carolina and to Orange, Va., inspecting the workings of a like truck and pump. Those making the trip were: D. S. John of the council and firemen J. F. Weatherly, and E. W. Breeden, Jr., O’Neal Kirkwood, H. S. Covington and W. S. Mowry. These men were highly pleased with the demonstrations. The Bennettsville city fire department has always performed a fine service. The losses over a period of years have been very small.”*

The Charlotte Observer of **June 19, 1932** published an article which says *“Prompt action by the fire department here this morning at 11*

o'clock extinguished flames in offices of McColl and company, cotton dealers, and prevented heavy loss in the heart of the business section. Cotton samples in some way became ignited and flames began to eat rapidly through the lint. Loss, it is understood, consisted mainly of burned cotton samples."

The **May 30, 1934** issue of The State reported that *"Fire of undetermined origin swept through four stores to the rear of the courthouse here last night causing damage estimated at \$7,500. The upper floor of the building was used as a rooming house, and the flames gained great headway, rapidly spreading through the hallway. A stiff north wind was blowing and this aided the flames. Guests and regular roomers were asleep but escaped uninjured though many suffered heavy loss of personal effects. The stores were occupied by a café, ice cream parlor and pool room."*

The Herald of Rock Hill, printed on **June 3, 1935**, that *"Fire Chief A. Mac. Marsh of Columbia, president of the state firemen's association, has announced a program featured by addresses, round table discussions, a memorial service and practical demonstrations in fire fighting for the organization's 30th annual convention at Bennettsville June 17-18. He said firemen from all parts of the state were expected to attend. Speakers for convention will include Governor Olin D. Johnston; State Insurance Commissioner Sam B. King; Mayor T. C. Crosland of Bennettsville; Fire Chief H. C. Danner of Beaufort; M. M. Levy of Bishopville; and N. W. Edens of Bennettsville."*

The on **June 17, 1935**, The State announced *"Approximately 700 visiting firemen are expected to be in Bennettsville June 17 and 18 for the convention. Nearly every fire department in the state will be represented and many visiting firemen from North Carolina. An elaborate program has been arranged for the meeting. Decorations*

have been in progress during the past week, flags being suspended across the streets, and windows and store buildings decorated. The Bennettsville fire department is entering a team in each of the races. Everything is being done by the citizens of Bennettsville to make this convention a great success, their homes being thrown open to the visiting firemen and every one is expected to have a good time."

The Herald of Rock Hill printed on **July 30, 1935**, that *"Fire Departments from Bennettsville and McColl, S.C. and Rockingham and Maxton sent aid to the local department in fighting a fire in the McLeod and Sinclair lumber plant that threatened 50,000 gallons of oil and a million feet of lumber. Only the boiler room was destroyed."*

The State paper printed, on **December 23, 1935**, that *"Fire originating in the basement today for a while threatened serious damage to the city school building but was brought under control with principal loss caused by smoke and water in the auditorium. The heating plant also was damaged. The origin of the fire was not determined."*

On **June 7, 1936**, The State noted that *"A barn fire on the farm of A. P. Breeden near here last night resulted in the loss of the building, 12 horses, 250 bushels of wheat, 16 tons of hay, 500 bushels of corn, several wagons and many farm implements. The blaze was thought to have started from spontaneous combustion."*

The Index-Journal of Greenwood of **November 16, 1937** issued notice that *"Fire destroyed an auction barn of the Follette Horse and Mule Company here early today together with livestock valued at \$15,000. Equipment of the Circle Bar F Ranch rodeo, stored at the barn, also was destroyed and the total loss was estimated at \$25,000. More than 100 horses and mules were trapped in the big barn and burned to death. A quantity of feed stuff also was*

destroyed. The blaze had gained such headway that efforts to bring it under control or remove the livestock were fruitless. Eight animals were rescued but several of these had to be killed because of several burns.”

A **December 10, 1937** article appeared in The State that informed the public that *“Brown’s Soda Shop was destroyed by fire this morning at 2:15 o’clock. The Flora Jane Beauty salon, other occupants of the building, suffered damage from smoke and water. The origin of the fire is unknown but it is surmised the flames started near the store room.”*

Fire damage a ginnery in Bennettsville, according to The Item of Sumter on **September 13, 1941**. *“The Centennial ginnery, owned by McColl and company here was damaged an estimated \$60,000 yesterday by fire believed to have started in a seed room.”*

Again, The Item reported on **April 27, 1942**, that *“Fire broke out yesterday in the Broad Street Drug company here and J. D. Blair, owner, estimated today that damage would be several thousand dollars.”*

The State newspaper of **May 28, 1942** printed *“The Bennettsville high school building was destroyed this morning by flames of undetermined origin. The fire apparently had been raging for some time before it was discovered about 7 o’clock and it could not be checked. Fire apparatus from Darlington and Cheraw was rushed to reinforce the Bennettsville fire department but the building was a complete loss. The high school was built in 1911.”*

The **June 23, 1943** edition of The State paper posted that *“A large barn containing about 6,000 bushels of newly threshed oats was destroyed by fire shortly before midnight Monday on the D. K. McColl*

farm about a mile east of Bennettsville. Two cows which were kept in the barn and about 1,500 bushels of the oats were saved.”

The **February 4, 1944** printing of The State reported that *“The Dixie Super Market located on Broad Street was completely destroyed by fire of undetermined origin yesterday morning, the fire being discovered about 5 o’clock. It had gained great headway and threatened adjoining stores but was confined to one building.”*

“BENNETTSVILLE HIT BY \$25,000 FIRE,” read the caption of The State on **March 28, 1946**. *“Fire believed to have been caused by a short circuit in one of the 25 cars and trucks under repair in the basement today destroyed the three story Breeden Brothers Auto company building. The vehicles were destroyed along with the firm’s shop and office equipment and a display of electrical appliances. Firemen succeeded in confining the blaze to the one building after a four-hour battle. The 10-year old structure was erected at a cost of \$25,000, part of which was covered by insurance.”*

The Columbia Record, published on **December 13, 1946**, recorded *“A spectacular midday blaze completely destroyed the beautiful home, known as the Cook Place, just a mile east of here yesterday. The house was one of the landmarks of Marlboro county, having been constructed before the War Between the States, and was on property owned by D. K. McColl, prominent Bennettsville cotton merchant. J. F. McLaurin, and his family were living in the house. The fire evidently started in the basement furnace. The Bennettsville fire department was called and two trucks were sent to the scene, but lack of water, a strong wind, and dense smoke hampered their efforts.”*

The Herald newspaper of Rock Hill published on **October 30, 1952** that *“Terry and Perry Purcel, 9-month-old Bennettsville twins, died*

yesterday in a fire which burned their home. Marlboro County Sheriff W. J. Weatherly said that the twins' parents, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Purcell, left them with a brother, Frank, 10, while they went to work."

The Columbia Record printed on **April 14, 1953** that *"The entire plant of the Delta Finishing Company, at Wallace, was in full operation yesterday following a fire in a loop drier of the finishing department Saturday night. The total damage was estimated at less than \$20,000, covered by insurance. Firemen from Bennettsville and Cheraw responded to a call for assistance in extinguishing the flames."*

On **November 18, 1965**, The Florence Morning News reported on major forest fires in the area. *"The Florence District of the South Carolina Forestry Commission had its largest number of forest fires in a day since last spring on Wednesday. Besides a fire near Bennettsville which destroyed over 100 acres of woodland, at least 18 other fires broke out in the six-county district. Gusty winds of up to 25 miles per hour and low humidity of under 20 were major contributing factors."* The article continues, *"Only one occupied residence was considered threatened, and a Bennettsville fire truck stood by it. Winds caused the fire to sweep several hundred yards east of the house."*

The Florence Morning News of **April 3, 1971** announced that *"Bennettsville Fire Chief Frank Townsend concluded 48 years of service here on April 1, retiring from the fire-fighting force. Townsend began his career with the Fire Department in 1923. Townsend became fire chief in 1950. He recalls that of the last 482 fire calls, he has missed only three. Townsend recalls that the city had only one fire truck, a 1919 American-LaFrance firemobile. Next came a Mack truck, a 1948 model 750 gallon pumper. The 500 gallon Seagrave is the newest addition to the equipment. The Bennettsville Fire*

Department is located on Market Street, adjacent to the city hall. Townsend says the 40-man fire fighting team is adequate, but that the building is not large enough to house the fire department. There are four salaried firemen, one on day shift and two at night.” Several weeks after Chief Townsend announced he was retiring, The S. C. Municipal Association presented the Chief a “public service award.”
Note: Former Chief Townsend died on October 28, 1977.

The **October 9, 1971** edition of The Florence Morning News reported that *“Thirteen members of the Bennettsville Fire Department this week completed a 42-hour course in basic fire fighting. The local firemen, nearly all volunteers, attended the classes at the city’s fire house every Monday night for three months. Carter H. Jones of Manning, an instructor for the course, said that one of the best features for this course is that it is taught in the firemen’s home community and that they use their own equipment. The course is designed for the volunteer fire department.”* **Note: This writer had the pleasure of helping to teach this department’s very first certified State Fire Academy approved basic firefighting course along with Captain Robert “Bobby” Baker of the Sumter Fire Department. Most of those who received their certificates have now passed away, but the memories they left behind are lasting.**

On **November 18, 1971**, The Charlotte Observer reported *“A midafternoon fire destroyed the Boro Products Company, a major industry here, Wednesday while five area fire departments poured water on the blaze without ever containing it. Bennettsville Fire Chief Frank Townsend said the loss, the worst in Bennettsville history, would amount to more than \$1 million. One fireman, Reid Lewis, suffered minor injuries in the early part of the fire. He was treated at a local hospital. The company, employing about 300 people, produced kitchen and other cabinetry which it shipped nationwide from its single plant in Bennettsville. David Montrose, a Bennettsville*

fireman, described the blaze. ‘When we got here, the whole place was in flames.’”

It was on **April 6, 1976** that The State newspaper announced the death of Charles E. Black, age 43, a Bennettsville City Councilman and former acting Chief of the Bennettsville Fire Department.

The **September 27, 1979** edition of The Herald of Rock Hill reported that *“A spark from an open fireplace in a child’s bedroom resulted in the death of a 2-year-old, authorities said. Philip Parham died Wednesday on his way to the Medical University in Charleston to receive treatment for severe burns he received during a blaze at his parents’ apartment. Chief William R. Hamilton of the Bennettsville Fire Department said the blaze at the apartment began at 2:10 p.m. Wednesday in the child’s room. A spark from the fireplace apparently ignited clothing in a nearby closet.”*

The Charlotte Observer, on **January 21, 1980**, reported *“When the Bennettsville Fire Department learned Sonny Herndon’s house was burning, two trucks and about 15 fire fighters rushed to the scene. But once there, they didn’t try to put out the fire, and the \$50,000 wood and brick house was destroyed. ‘It could have been saved—there’s no doubt about,’ Bennettsville Fire Chief Bill Hamilton said recently of the December 31 incident. Herndon, a 44-year-old meat market operator, was so angry he took out a half-page advertisement in the Marlboro Herald-Advocate telling local agencies—including the fire department—to ‘drop dead.’”*

The article continues, *“The reason the fire department didn’t try to save the house is geographic; Herndon lives a mile outside Bennettsville in an area that doesn’t have a professional fire department. Bennettsville fire department will go out of town if a homeowner pays \$12.50 a year to join a city-sponsored fire*

protection association. Department fire fighters will fight a fire outside town if lives seem in danger—which is why they went to the Herndon house.”

A weather system that spawned a group of severe tornadoes across South Carolina and into North Carolina focused some of its wrath in Marlboro County. The U. S. Weather Service confirmed the tornado was a F4 with winds between 207-260 mph. The Florence Morning News reported on **March 29, 1984** that *“A killer tornado touched down about 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at a shopping center on the northeast side of town. The earliest death toll available was four people killed (later information confirmed eight people died). The tornado skipped about half a mile after hitting the shopping center and ripped through an apartment complex. It skipped again and hit a housing development.”* Bennettsville Fire Chief, Jerry Raley, told of 330 fire and rescue personnel responded to the emergency. The disaster brought first responders from throughout the Pee Dee and from neighboring parts of North Carolina.

An article published in the Detroit Free Press on **March 30, 1984**, said that *“the Bennettsville tornado was one of the most severe of a group of tornadoes that tore from one end of the Carolinas to the other Wednesday evening. The twisters dropped down like sledgehammers from the sky to rip off rooftops, curl sheets of metal around guy wires, snap trees and carry off mobile homes and all their contents—including people.”*

The Greenville News printed a story on **January 27, 1985** about the dangers of fireworks in Bennettsville. *“Fires set off by fireworks during the recent dry spell have resulted in stiffer fireworks ordinances in Bennettsville and Cheraw. Bennettsville Fire Chief Jerry Raley said 16 fires were reported in December that were started by fireworks. One fire burned part of a vacant house in a nice*

residential section and another destroyed a storage building behind a house in the downtown area.”

Charlotte Observer, on **January 18, 1986**, printed that “Arson is suspected in a fire that damaged offices in the west wing of the Marlboro County Courthouse early Friday. The fire was discovered shortly after 12:50 a.m. by Bennettsville police Sgt. Robert Pruitt, who noticed paper stuffed into the gas tank of a sheriff’s department car parked outside the sheriff’s office. Chief Deputy Richard Quick was notified and when he opened a door leading to the sheriff’s office to get keys to move the car, a fiery blast came from inside. Bennettsville Assistant Fire Chief Dixon Odom said two engines and 22 firefighters responded to the call and the fire was extinguished in about 30 minutes.”

The State reported on an arson fire in the **April 13, 1986** edition of the paper. “A fire wreaked an estimated \$250,000 damage on four buildings in the town business district resulted from arson, the Bennettsville fire chief said. Three dumpsters in downtown alleys were set on fire, and one of the dumpsters ignited the buildings early Friday, said Fire Chief Jerry Raley. The fire gutted a variety and antique shop on Broad Street. Fire departments from Blenheim, Cheraw, Clio, McColl and Wallace assisted Bennettsville firefighters in bringing the blaze under control. Fireman Freddy Stubbs received burns when part of a building collapsed but he was not hospitalized, Raley said.”

On **June 7, 1989**, the Florence Morning News noted “Investigations are continuing into a fire which heavily damaged a Marlboro County nightspot last week. Investigators from the South Carolina Arson Control Team spent time last week going through the wreckage of the Paradise Club on Highway 401, about two miles south of Bennettsville. Over 30 firefighters from the Bennettsville Fire

Department responded to the 1:58 a.m. call. Assistance from the Blenheim, Clio and Wallace rural fire departments was required, as there are no water supplies in the area of the fire. Assistant Fire Chief Dixon Odom said it took about 30 minutes to control.”

The **October 31, 1990** edition of the Florence Morning News printed *“Two young sisters died in a house fire Tuesday morning, and their babysitter suffered minor injuries trying to rescue the children. It appeared the 11:30 a.m. blaze may have started from the fireplace in the living room, Bennettsville Fire Chief Tommy Bostick said. The fireplace didn’t have a protective screen.”*

According to the **January 2, 1995** printing of the Florence Morning News, *“Four people killed in a Bennettsville house fire Saturday died of smoke inhalation. No one had attempted to get to the door or windows. The four were apparently sleeping in the house’s only bedroom. Coroner Brown said he believes a cigarette may have ignited the sofa where one man slept. The State Law Enforcement Division was called in to determine if the fire was caused by arson.”*

The **December 4, 1996** edition of the Florence Morning News reported on results of a fire study of the fire department. *“The city received high marks for its water system’s ability to handle fire emergencies, but scored low in its actual fire department, an independent auditor said. The biggest problem with Bennettsville fire department is that it is understaffed. The city has an average of two full-time firefighters on duty at all times. Ideally, a city Bennettsville’s size should have 24 on duty. There are few or no cities that operate with an optimum staff according to Insurance Service Office recommendations. Bennettsville currently rates a 4 on the ISO scale. According to the study, the city would slip to a 5 if the ISO inspection were done today. Other areas needing improvement include: Not enough training time and no training facilities; hydrants*

are 20 to 40 years old and neglected needing repair; city lacking an optimum ladder truck.”

According to the Florence Morning News of **September 28, 2004**, *“A Bennettsville man remains at the Joseph M. Still Burn Center in Augusta, Ga., after suffering serious injuries in a weekend fire at his home. Levon Quick, whose age was given as 44, suffered smoke inhalation and burns to his arms, neck and face when a fire broke out in the kitchen of his Woodrow Street residence about 9 p.m. Saturday, Bennettsville Fire Chief H. Dixon Odom said. Quick was pulled out of the house by firefighters and was later transported by Med-Evac helicopter to the burn center. Odom says it appears that the fire was the accidental result of a pot left burning on the stove.”*

The Florence Morning News reported on **June 22, 2012** that *“David Frederick Montrose, 63, of Florence passed away. David was a retired engineer with Bennettsville Fire Department after 43 years of dedicated service. David also had been employed with Marlboro General Hospital, a 911 dispatcher, served as Deputy Coroner and worked with the Marlboro County Sheriff’s Department. At the time of his death David was serving as Assistant Fire Chief of Palmetto Rural Fire Department in Darlington. David was voted Fireman of the Year at Bennettsville in 2000 and was the first Bennettsville Fire Department member to be certified as an EMT.”*

“Man Dies In Bennettsville House Fire Monday Morning,” read the caption in the **August 10, 2016** printing of the Florence Morning News. *“A 44-year-old man died as a result of a house fire Monday morning near Bennettsville. Marlboro County Coroner Tim Brown identified the man as Jason Conrad. The brick house was destroyed by the fire. The cause of the blaze has not yet been reported.”*

Bennettsville Fire Chiefs

Thomas Sparks

Throop C. Crosland (Asst. Chief)

W. P. Breeden

P. Kirksey Meaken

Earl Grist (Asst. Chief)

R. B. Kirkwood

N. W. Edens

Frank Townsend

Charles Black (Acting Chief)

Bill Hamilton

Richard Quick (?)

Gene Armstrong

Jerry Raley

Tommy Bostick

Dixon Odom

James Jackson

Chris Burks