

The Evolution Of The Manning Fire Department 1871-1937

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Jamestown was the first English settlement in North America established in 1607, but it wasn't until the mid-1600s that colonists actually colonized in the coastal areas near Charleston, Georgetown and Beaufort. By the late 1680s trade was booming, and a number of brave souls began to migrate inland to establish trade routes to the midlands and upstate. Many small villages and townships were established in the 1700s, among which was Columbia (1686), Camden (1732), Orangeburg (1735), and Kingstree (1737).

However, it wasn't until the early 1800s that a small group of settlers made their homes in the "Village of Manning." In 1855 the legislature appointed some men to select and purchase a tract of land for the village in what had become Clarendon County. Captain Joseph Burgess helped organize the village's citizens and gave land for the Courthouse and jail. Manning was named for John Lawrence Manning who served as a Member of the House, Senate and later became Governor (1852-1854).

Clarendon County and the Town of Manning were deeply involved in our state's early history. The famous General Francis Marion fought in the Revolutionary War and participated in many skirmishes around the county and even defeated Cornwallis at the Battle of Nelson's Ferry in 1780. He was named "The Swamp Fox" on the edge of town at Ox Swamp. In addition, during Potter's Raid a large portion of the original town, including the Courthouse, was destroyed in 1865 near the end of the Civil War.

After the Civil War businesses and houses began to spring up in the prospering little community as more and more people saw potential for growth and opportunities to make a living and raise their families. The actual Certificate of Incorporation was not officially finalized until May 13, 1876. A majority of the construction used in that day was made of

wood, and the only source for heating and cooking was, of course, wood. However, in the small town a few merchants were farsighted in building their properties out of brick. Sadly, "the fire fiend," as it was sometimes called in those days, was a frequent visitor to those early entrepreneurs, and the destruction and heartache caused by annoying fires were enormous.

The author, Nancy Backes, said *"Americans had for many years helplessly watched their little wooden towns burn and be rebuilt and burn again."* And, Manning was no different with its need to better defend its citizens and their properties from the ravages of unwanted fires.

We have all this historical information about how our community was settled and became a town, but virtually no information is known about how our forefathers dealt with the many fires that plagued the area over those developing years. Therefore, this writer will attempt to capture the rich history of the Manning Fire Department that is available in print in order to expand on the struggles, leadership, major challenges, and progression of its long history of service. Much of the history provided in the following pages is taken verbatim from various newspaper accounts (primarily The Manning Times) and commentaries, tales and stories, with an occasional observation by this researcher. So, let's begin....

There was always the threat of fire because, as was mentioned above, most of the houses and businesses were made of wood. In those early days there was no fire protection for the citizens other than buckets, well water, wet blankets, rakes, axes, shovels and pine tops. Neighbors were alerted to these fires by the ringing of church bells or even citizens shooting rifles, pistols or shotguns into the air three times to get curious attention of their neighbors.

As the "Village of Manning" grew more prosperous and in population, the residents began to realize they had to do something to prevent

these unwanted and sometimes deliberately set fires. With more construction of buildings in the business square and new houses going up, so did the frequency and magnitude of the fires. In time the town's leadership created rudimentary fire and building codes to hopefully prevent and limit the spread of fires. They even created a "fire zone" around the Courthouse and central business district forbidding any further wooden buildings from being constructed. Loosely organized citizen volunteers started a fire brigade. Homeowners were encouraged to have buckets and ladders available for use when the alarm of fire was sounded. In the early days Manning had dozens of abundant flowing artesian wells years before a waterworks system was ever even considered.

The Charleston Daily News reported on **July 11, 1871** that *"An attempt was made on Saturday night, July 1, to set fire to the warehouse of Mr. M. Levi, of Manning; fortunately, the fire was discovered before any damage was done."*

Fires were frequently experienced all over the county as The Daily Phoenix, a Columbia paper, noted in the **July 9, 1872** edition of their paper. *"The valuable residence of Dr. T. W. Briggs, situated in Clarendon County, about fifteen miles from Manning, was totally destroyed by fire early on Wednesday last."*

Again, the Daily Phoenix shared a brief notice of a large fire in Manning in the **January 20, 1875** printing of the paper. *"What is known as the old hotel at Manning, S. C. was destroyed by fire on the 11th. Loss about \$5,000."*

On **February 14, 1877**, The Abbeville Press and Banner announced yet another fire of significance. *"Manning has had an incendiary fire. R. M. Thompson's law office, and trial justice E. G. DuBose's office were burnt."*

The Watchman and Southron from Sumter shared some interesting information about a major fire in Manning and its fire department in

their **April 28, 1885** printing. *“We regret to learn that Manning has been visited by a destructive fire. The fire originated in the store of Mr. Louis Weinberg, about 2 o’clock on Sunday morning, and is supposed to have been caused by the explosion of a lamp which was left burning in the store. From this building the flames spread rapidly in every direction, and despite the efforts of the fire department, which consists of a hook and ladder company, all the business portion of the town, except two stores, was consumed.”* The article states eleven offices and stores along with several outhouses and warehouses were burned.

This writer notes the first mention of Manning having a fire department (1885) which leads one to believe the department was started several years earlier possibly at the beginning of the 1880s. The article says it consisted of a *“hook and ladder company”*. Early hook and ladder trucks were really a fancy wagon which carried an assortment of tools, ladders, buckets, hooks and chains, tarps, ropes, pike poles, axes, etc. These wagons were usually drawn by hand and eventually modernized by hitching horses to pull the apparatus.

The same fire was picked up in the **April 30, 1885** edition of The Yorkville Enquirer (York). *“A fire occurred in Manning at about two o’clock last Saturday morning, destroying all the property in the principal business square.”*

The dwelling of Dr. J. I. Ingram narrowly escaped burning on Sunday morning the 7th,” according to the Manning Times dated **March 10, 1886**. *“Catching from sparks out of the chimney, the shingles on the roof were in a bright blaze when discovered. The timely assistance of Mr. J. H. Lesesne, who reached the top of the house at considerable risk, and with water checked the flames till the arrival of the Hook and Ladder truck, saved the building.”*

The Manning Times reported on **April 7, 1886** that *“During the past year a judgement for \$212.50, long standing against the town has been*

paid, and a hook and ladder truck purchased for a protection against the ravages of fire.”

The Sumter newspaper, The Watchman and Southron, published a description of another fire on **October 25, 1886**. *“The cotton at the depot at Manning was found to be on fire about two o’clock Sunday afternoon, and before the flames could be subdued, the platform and about seventy bales were burned. The origin of the fire is unknown but is supposed to be from careless smokers, or sparks from a passing train.”*

In those early days, the Manning Fire Department had two fire companies...one comprised of whites and one of African-Americans. Both fire companies worked well together, but an article in The Manning Times indicates the white fire company was not real active or zealous, but the black company was more energetic and involved. An article in the **June 19, 1889** issue of the paper reported that the town council suggested giving the “hook & ladder truck” to the colored people to operate. *“Several years ago the town purchased a hook and ladder truck, and a white fire company was organized. This company has long since gone to pieces. Why not now turn over the truck to a colored company? They would appreciate it, and in case of fire would do a valuable service. We suggest that they organize a fire company, and we feel confident that the town will turn the truck over to them. Organize at once.”*

The Watchman and Southron reported on a fire in the **April 2, 1890** newspaper. *“A disastrous fire occurred in Manning on Monday night last, originating from causes unknown in the Post Office destroying that building with its contents and all adjoining houses. The houses burned were four or five in number—all built of wood.”*

That same day, The Manning Times on **April 2, 1890** made an appeal which said, *“Manning needs and must have a fire engine. Turn the hook and ladder truck over to the colored people.”* In 1890 there was no

waterworks to deliver water for fire protection, and the town had no apparatus to pump the water. Reference is later made of the town having a “hand pumper” which was pulled by hand and operated by volunteers who used muscle power to pump the pistons to propel the water supplied by a bucket brigade.

A month later, on **May 21, 1890**, The Manning Times said *“The town council has called a meeting of citizens of this town next Monday afternoon, to determine whether or not a town hall is to be built. We don’t want to stop at the town hall: we want a fire engine, and a railroad, and a wagon factory, and a canning factory, a cotton factory, and some business men full of life and vim.”*

“SET ON FIRE BY LIGHTNING” read the headlines in the **June 11, 1890** edition of The Manning Times. *“Manning was visited yesterday afternoon by a cloud burst, and for an hour the rain poured in torrents. Just about the time the rain began, lightning struck the stables in rear of B. A. Walker’s store, setting them on fire. These stables were very low, and it is a surprise the lightning did not strike some higher object. Mr. Walker’s horse was in the stable at the time, but was not hurt. Although the rain was pouring, yet in a few minutes a large flame was burning the stables. Several went in the rain to the fire, and a lot of salt, hides, etc. stored in one of the rooms, was saved. It was a peculiar sight to see a great flame burning so fiercely in a deluging rain storm. Adjoining fences and stables were torn down, and in a half hour the fire was under control. All the stores in that part of town are brick.”* Note: In the early days of firefighting, when there wasn’t sufficient water to throw on a fire, firemen often tore down exposures in order to stop the spread of flames as they did in this article.

On **July 23, 1890**, The Manning Times announced *“The dwelling house of Mrs. Sarah A. Burgess, about two miles east of Manning, was destroyed by fire Monday morning about nine o’clock. There was no insurance, and it is supposed that it caught from the stovepipe.”*

“DESTRUCTIVE FIRE IN MANNING” read the headlines in The Watchman and Southron paper of **December 6, 1893**. *“Manning was visited by a fire on Saturday night that destroyed a number of the largest stores, and causing a loss of, at least, \$65,000. The fire originated in the livery stable of Legg & Hutchinson, extending south and across the street, consuming the markets of O. E. Webber and Edward Thomas, the Manning Bank, the stores of Moses Levi, Sires & Chandler, Louis Loyns, the Western Union Telegraph office, the office of the Manning Times, and unoccupied store and a number of small buildings. There is no fire department in the town, and this city (Sumter) was wired to for aid. Chief Bloom and a squad responded promptly, but when they arrived could render no service as the fire had burned itself out.”* Apparently the “fire department” and “hook and ladder truck” mentioned previously had fallen into shambles because of a lack of interest.

Another significant fire occurred on **February 2, 1894** and briefly recorded in The Manning Times. *“‘Tis an ill wind that blows no good,’ is an old maxim which very often comes true...the recent fire in Manning had had the effect of reducing the prices of goods our farmers are bound to use. Moses Levi’s store burned out but is building a new store, and S. A. Rigby also was a victim of the fire and is now at work on a plan for a new store.”*

As has already been noted, not all fires in Manning were accidental, and the next article which appeared in The Manning Times on **March 14, 1894** gives proof. *“It is a rare thing, that Manning ever indulges in the sensational, but for the past week or more several strangers have been seen about town. The strangers turned out to be detectives seeking out parties that laid our town in ashes. One of the Charleston detectives got on the trail of a man believed to be a leader of the Manning fire gang. The work of ferreting out the crime is steadily going on, and the detectives appear to be confident of soon being able to cage the gang.”* Governor Tillman even offered a \$100 reward for the perpetrator(s).

Manning sure had its share of fires, and it ain't over yet. The Watchman and Southron noted on **June 6, 1894** that *"Another destruction of wooden buildings by fire occurred here last night between 11 and 12 o'clock. The fire commenced in the livery building owned and occupied by Messrs. Bradham & Thomas, and owing to the quantity of fodder and hay they had on hand the flames spread very rapidly. In a very short time five buildings had been destroyed, four of which were private residences."* The article says that Raymond Wilson lived just in back of the stable and came very close to having all his children *"consumed in the flames of his dwelling."* The cause of this fire *"is believed to be the work of an incendiary."*

On **September 4, 1895**, The Watchman and Southron shared that *"The colored Methodist church, parsonage, and school house were burned to the ground last night. The fire started at 8:30 o'clock and in a short time the three buildings were a mass of flames. The fire was accidental, having started while the sexton was lighting the lamps for the night services. While he was filling a lighted lamp in the chandelier it slipped from his hand and fell to the floor where it was broken to pieces. The blazing oil spread over the church floor almost instantly, and it was utterly impossible to extinguish the flames."*

The Sanborn Maps of South Carolina dated **December 1895** reveal the population of Manning was 950 residents, and the town had a hook and ladder truck. (But, was it in use?)

The Greenwood Daily Journal printed a story on **May 20, 1897** which stated, *"At Manning, fire destroyed Bradham's ginnery, county dispensary, with its entire stock, Bradham & Thomas' big stables and two big warehouses, all full of vehicles. Two horses from the stable ran down the railroad and becoming fastened in a trestle, wrecked a night freight train, pitching the engine in Black River and wrecking three box cars."*

The Watchman and Southron newspaper headlined "**BIG FIRE IN MANNING**" on **November 3, 1897**. *"Just before the break of day an alarm of fire was sounded, which aroused almost every inhabitant in the little city. The cry of, FIRE! FIRE! was heard from every quarter, and soon, there were gathered upon the streets hundreds of people. The fire was found to be in the handsome new brick store of Harvin and Barron. The flames spread rapidly over the entire building and it looked as if the entire block would be consumed. With no fire department to render service, what could be done? A bucket brigade was soon formed and men were kept busy throwing water upon the flames. The origin of the fire is unknown. Manning is a progressive little town, but with no fire department for protection of her property, she can't expect to reach the high water mark of progressiveness."*

The Manning Times reported sad information about a fellow citizen in the **December 25, 1895** paper. *"The news reached her last Saturday that the day before, at the Charleston Hospital, Thomas Nimmer, the Assyrian, who was badly burned in Manning's recent fire, had his right arm amputated at the shoulder."*

The **May 4, 1898** edition of The Watchman and Southron printed, *"This town has again been visited by a serious fire, causing a loss of three or four thousand dollars. The store of Mr. W. T. Wilkins and a five-room dwelling occupied by Mr. S. R. Venning, were burned to the ground together with all the contents. The origin of the fire has not been discovered."*

Again, The Watchman and Southron reported on yet another bad fire in the town on **November 1, 1899**. *"Yesterday morning about 3 o'clock smoke was discovered oozing from the store of C. W. Kendal, commonly called the racket store, and the building was so full of smoke that the front glass was almost ready to burst out. The fire was in the back of the building, about the millinery room, and no one could get to it on account of the dense smoke. As the town had no fire protection, the*

building had to burn, and it was with great work that many adjoining buildings were not lost also.”

Over the years, the lumber mill in Alcolu has suffered quite its share of fires. The Watchman and Southron reported on one such fire in their **July 11, 1900** edition of the paper. *“On Sunday afternoon a considerable fire occurred at the mill of the Alderman and Sons Lumber Company at Alcolu, four miles above here. The fire was purely accidental.”*

Again, this writer referenced the Sanborn Maps of South Carolina and found the population of Manning to be about 1,200 people in **September 1900**; city hall was located on Keitt Street; and the fire department operated with one hook and ladder truck (the survey surely did not check to determine if the fire department and apparatus were functioning).

The Manning Times conveyed in the **August 13, 1902** paper that another serious fire occurred at the mill in Alcolu. *“During an electric storm last Wednesday night, lightning struck the office of D. W. Alderman Son’s and Company setting it on fire and destroying it. The books were saved.”*

The County Record (Kingstree) reported on **October 22, 1903** that *“A very disastrous fire broke out this morning between 3 and 4 o’clock in the large department stores of W. E. Jenkinson. The adjoining store, occupied by the Manning Grocery Company, was a total loss. Manning is without protection against the fire fiend.”*

A bit of humor can always be found in the history of every fire department and community, and Manning is no different. The Manning Times of **November 19, 1905** reports that *“A fire alarm was given Friday afternoon which scattered all through town causing considerable sensation, but it turned out to be cries of a drunken man who had been placed in the guard house. When he hollered ‘fire’ the*

cry was taken up and sounded all along the line causing a great crowd to run to that part of town."

On Wednesday, **March 6, 1907**, The Manning Times printed about another disastrous fire in Alcolu at the Alderman Lumber Company. *"In the destructive fire which occurred at Alcolu Tuesday afternoon, the following property totally destroyed: Alcolu hotel, Alcolu chapel, residence of J. B. Bagnal and Dr. W. M. Brockington's office. The excellent waterworks at Alcolu prevented what might have been a more serious fire."* The Alderman Lumber Company always had an active fire brigade along with its own waterworks. On the corner of Hotel and Main Streets in Alcolu, in the yard of Clarendon Baptist Church, is the only remaining "hydrant" from that early system of fire protection.

Before Manning could even properly announce the arrival of the new fire engine, it was put into service on **November 14, 1907** when The Manning Times reported that *"A small tenet house on Church Street caught on fire, but through the prompt and efficient work of the fire engine, the young men succeeded in putting the fire out before much damage was done. This was but another demonstration of the wisdom of the council in purchasing the fire apparatus."*

At last the town is giving attention to its need for a fire engine as noted in the **November 20, 1907** paper. *"The new fire engine cost net \$1,600, the old one repurchased (by the manufacturer) for \$212. The hose, hose reel, fire horses and other equipment cost several hundred more. The town has had ten cisterns constructed so far, the largest ones costing slightly in excess of \$200 each, and the smaller ones slightly in excess of \$150 each, or about an average of \$175 each for ten that have been constructed."* Four more cisterns were to be constructed. On Church Street between Huggins and Keitt Streets (behind the Bank of Clarendon) is buried one of the remaining 11,000 gallon cisterns.

The Manning Times, on **May 29, 1907** sheds more light about a new fire engine. *"Manning's new fire engine has arrived, and is a great*

improvement on the old one. The pump is worked by gasoline power instead of hand, and the pressure is much greater.” This writer found where the fire engine was purchased from The Howe Fire Apparatus Company of Anderson, Indiana. It was a horse-drawn apparatus which provided for a driver and a fireman or two on the “tailboard.” Interestingly, Manning, again purchased two Howe fire engines many years later (1964 and 1972), one of which I traveled to the factory to share the drive to Manning.

The local paper of **June 26, 1907** pushed for lower fire insurance rates because of better fire protection. *“Manning has now two good fire engines, with a sufficient supply of fire wells (cisterns) to protect the property from fire. It is now up to our business men, and town authorities to take this matter up with the insurance companies.”*

A very lengthy account of a fire is found in the **August 21, 1907** edition of The Manning Times. *“A very serious electrical storm struck Manning last Saturday afternoon, accompanied by a tremendous downpour of rain. The lightning struck the steeple of the Methodist Church, setting it on fire. Mr. A. C. McFaddin, who had just driven in, saw the lightning when it struck and at once gave the alarm. The church bell rang, and in four minutes from the tap of the town bell the fire engine was speeding its way to the fire. There being no ladders at hand, the fire was difficult to reach, but by the most persistent work of the firemen, the church was saved from destruction.”*

The article continues, *“We will venture to say the work done by Manning’s fire department here last Saturday would be a credit to the department of a large city. This fire was well under way and burning vigorously beneath the metal covering of the steeple which was out of reach of ladders. They played on the fire three streams for a while and it was only by flooding the tower that they saved the property. The saving of the church property alone has more than repaid the citizens of the town for the money spent for fire protection.”*

The editor also wrote an appeal to the town's citizens in the same issue of the paper. *"There is an absolute need for discipline about a fire, and somebody should be the leader, the head of the fire company and the citizens or even police cannot lead. Council should instruct the police to keep the citizens away from the firemen and, this will give those officers enough to do."* The Fire Chief, S. L. Krasnoff, also wrote that *"All persons are requested to keep away from the fire department during a fire, and not to interfere in anyway with the firemen. If your assistance is needed you will be called on."* Interestingly, this writer found where Chief Krasnoff was quite a busy man: he *"perfected himself in the profession of undertaking;"* he ran a furniture store where he sold *"refrigerators, ice cream freezers, pianos, and screen doors."* He served as a school trustee in addition to his duties as fire chief.

People will be people, as they are today, and everybody had an opinion. Some folks became agitated by the frequent sounding of the fire bell. Again, The Manning Times reported on **November 6, 1907** that *"citizens were complaining that the fire bell was ringing too much."* Maybe, just maybe, it was because Manning was burning down with frequent fires!!

On **January 8, 1908**, appears a story, my favorite story, about an accident involving the fire horses and reckless driving. The editor of The Manning Times writes, *"There came near being a very fatal accident in Manning last Friday afternoon, as it turned out three men were hurt, the fire engine damaged, and a splendid horse ruined. Chief S. L. Krasnoff and Mr. S. W. Barron of the fire department concluded to give the fire horses exercise. Mr. Krasnoff mounted the seat and Mr. Barron the rear step. At the order of the chief, the engine house doors were thrown open, and out come the horses under whip at, full speed: a cow happened in the street and Mr. Krasnoff in trying to avoid the cow, miscalculated the turn at the corner with the result that the ponderous machine in making the sudden turn at the reckless rate of speed, turned over, and it was a little short of a miracle that Messrs. Krasnoff and Barron were not crushed to death beneath it. As it was, Krasnoff got his*

back badly wrenched, and Barron his face cut. The engine was damaged; after the horses were extricated from the overturned engine one of them from fright and excitement became unmanageable. Mr. W. P. Hawkins and Willie Herbe, both accustomed to handling horses, attempted to quiet the animal but could do nothing with it. Mr. Hawkins was severely hurt by the excited animal's pawing."

The article continues, "It is to be hoped our over-zealous firemen will not undertake to come out of the engine house again at break neck speed. There is no necessity for it, in the first place, and then no one should be allowed to drive the engine except one who thoroughly understands driving. All of us regret the accident that befell Messrs. Krasnoff and Barron, but they had no right to jeopardize their own lives and that of other citizens by such reckless driving. We understand that Chief Krasnoff offered to pay for the damage done to the engine, but we hope he will not be allowed to do so, as his public spirit would be little appreciated by our citizens if they permitted him to pay for this accident."

Well, believe it or not, it happened again! The Manning Times posted this article on **February 26, 1908**. *"Yesterday afternoon Wright, the regular driver for the fire engine, hitched up to practice the horses, and by the time he cleared the engine house the horses broke into a run down Keitt Street, and in turning the corner of West Boundary Street the speed was so great that the engine overturned and was badly injured. Several parts of castings are broken, and we do not think they can be repaired here. It looks as if our fire apparatus is fated to be ruined. We cannot understand the necessity to come out of the fire house at full speed nor is it safe to drive a top-heavy machine at a break-neck gait around corners. Somebody should put a stop to such recklessness. Mr. Frank Hawkins, in an effort to stop the horses, got pretty badly bruised, and came out of the conflict with his pants badly torn."*

The Manning Times reported on the fire department going to a meeting in their **July 1, 1908** printing of the paper. *“The Manning Fire Department will be represented at the Firemen’s Tournament at Darlington this week.”*

A fire is reported in The Manning Times on **July 29, 1908** which could have been disastrous. *“What might have been a huge fire was prevented last Monday night about midnight by the timely discovery of a fire in the Leonard Building. A boy, Bernard Harris, was passing the corner and heard something drop upon the inside. It attracted his attention and he called a policeman at the other corner, a hasty investigation was made which disclosed a fire. The alarm was sounded, the fire engine responded and after flooding the place, the fire was put out. It was as good piece of work as any fire department could have done.”*

For a number of years, the town had in place an ordinance forbidding the construction of wooden buildings around the Court House Square in order to limit the spread of fire should one occur., However, on **September 13, 1908**, The Manning Times reported that a meeting of town council was held to discuss the ordinance prohibiting erection of wooden structures 300 feet from the Court House Square. *“Arguments showed what this would do against advancement of the town. By a vote of two to five, council confirmed issuing of a permit granted to Messrs. Coffey and Rigby to erect a large frame wooden stable about 100 feet from the square. This means other wooden buildings can be built and increase materially the danger of fire and increasing insurance rates—a drawback to prosperity of Manning”*

Not all horses have the abilities to serve as fire horses pulling heavy machines through often unpaved streets at break-neck speeds. Apparently, that was the case for the little town as noted in The Manning Times on **January 20, 1909**. *“One of the black fire engine*

horses has been reduced to ranks. He is now working to a wagon with a mule hauling sand."

On **February 10, 1909**, The Watchman and Southron tells that *"Fire destroyed the building owned by Mr. J. W. McLeod and contents of the store occupied by R. B. Bradham & Company, general merchandise. The fire started at 9:10 A. M., and was under control by 10:05, owing to the very efficient service of the Manning Fire Department. Had it not been for two fire engines well manned and a splendid and adequate water supply it would have proved a very disastrous fire."*

The Watchman and Southron reported on **September 11, 1909** that *"Fire broke out in the store occupied by Mr. G. L. Thames, known as the Clarendon, this morning at 3 o'clock. The Manning Fire Department by their promptness and skillful management confined the fire to where it had begun."*

The Herald News of Newberry wrote a humorous piece about Manning in their **September 27, 1910** paper. *"There was a fire in Manning the other day at which people wept because the department extinguished the blaze. It was valuable because it swept away certain old frame buildings which had long been eye-sores, but it was prevented from making a finish job."*

It is noted in the **July 1, 1911** issue of The Manning Times that *"The Manning Fire Department gets from the one percent insurance levy \$168.10. This amount will aid in the purchase of more equipment."*

In the same paper another article says *"About one o'clock yesterday morning there was a considerable fire at Foreston which resulted in wiping out several stores, practically all of the business houses, with very little of their stocks saved."*

The Bamberg Herald on **December 14, 1911** noted *"The fertilizer factory, a branch of the Manning Cotton Seed Oil Mill, was totally*

destroyed by fire about noon today. The supposition is that the fire started from a spark thrown off by a passing locomotive."

The Sanborn Maps of South Carolina of **March 1912** noted the population of Manning was about 2,000 residents. It provided the following information: The fire department consisted of a chief, assistant chief, and two fire companies...one white with 12 members and one colored, also with 12 members. The fire house was located on Keitt Street (next door to what was Quality Printers), and the fire bell was located on Boyce Street near the Confederate monument. The department operated with one "hand engine", one gasoline pumping engine, two horses (worked on the road during the day pulling the garbage wagon), a paid driver and engineer. There was no hose wagon, but there was one hose reel which carried about 500 feet of 2 ½" hose, the remaining held in reserve. In later years the hose reel was towed behind the gasoline pumping engine rather than being pulled by hand.

The waterworks consisted of 14 flowing wells and 14 cisterns having capacities of 11,000 gallons each. The cisterns were kept full at all times, and was possible to get three streams out of each cistern. The waterworks were installed in 1907. The streets are unpaved, and the town has electric public lights.

On **April 15, 1914**, The Manning Times reported that *"Manning was visited by fire last Saturday afternoon, which at one time bid fair to have been the most serious conflagration we have ever had; as it was, there was a considerable loss. The fire originated in a barn belonging to Thomas Nimmer, from there it spread to the sale stables of F. C. Thomas and on to the dwelling of S. J. Bowman. The alarm was given about 4:30 o'clock, in a few minutes the fire engine was out and at work, but from the beginning, on account of the inflammable material, the closeness of the adjacent buildings, and the difficulty of getting where a stream of water could be placed at the right places, it was only by the hardest work the fire could be arrested. The heat from the fire was so*

intense that several times buildings on the opposite side of the street caught. Flakes of fire went flying about, one went as far as the school house on Church Street, and it was only by a timely discovery this building was saved from destruction, it was in full blaze on the roof when discovered.” The article continues, *“The fire department deserves much praise. Chief Leard Huggins was the only person injured, and he came off with a broken thumb which is giving him considerable pain, but it did not daunt him. Just as soon as he could get medical attention he was back on the job, and worked as hard as the hardest until all danger was over.”*

It should be noted here that the United States entered World War I on **July 8, 1914** and ended on November 11, 1918. All of South Carolina was impacted significantly by this war, including Clarendon County. Manning sent many of her boys off to war, some 250, and changed the routine of life as was accustomed in that day. Quite a number of those who went off to war from our area lost their lives or returned with severe injuries.

The **January 6, 1915** edition of The Manning Times noted that *“Chief Leard Huggins has installed a telephone in the fire engine house, so in case of fire at night, ring for the engine house.”* And, in the same paper it was reported that *“The residence of Mr. D. M. Bradham had a very narrow escape from being destroyed by fire last Friday, only the timely discovery of a blaze on the roof of the dining room, and the prompt work of those who reached the scene early saved it with very little damage.”*

The County Record of Kingstree reported on the tornado that hit Manning on May 7th in their **May 13, 1915** publication with the headlines, *“TORNADO WORKS FEARFUL HAVOC.”* *“A tornado struck the centre of the town of Manning shortly after 4 o’clock this afternoon and caused fearful destruction of life and property. The principal force of the storm was limited to a radius of about one hundred and fifty yards*

of the Confederate monument, on the Court House grounds, and in that area property to the amount of \$200,000 was destroyed. Three lives were lost and several persons seriously injured.” This writer was told this story many times by Miss Mammie Johnson, a neighbor, who was a young secretary working for Judge Taylor H. Stukes in his law office on West Boyce Street. According to her account, as the winds picked up, she and Judge Stukes scrambled under a large desk when the tornado struck. Neither of them were hurt. Judge Stukes went on to become the Chief Justice of South Carolina Supreme Court in 1954 and served in both the House and Senate.

A huge announcement was made in the **March 8, 1916** edition of The Manning Times. *“Manning’s big automobile fire truck has arrived, and with the fine system of waterworks we now have, this town is certainly up-to-date from a firefighting view. The truck is a six cylinder, 60 horse power American LaFrance, fully equipped with ladders, picks, axes, a chemical tank, and in fact everything that is needed. We also have a good volunteer company, and with a little practice, and the proper encouragement from the citizens, the boys will give a grand account of themselves whenever an alarm is turned in.”*

In the same edition of the paper it’s noted that *“Last Thursday morning about one o’clock the fire alarm was sounded, and it was found that the Bottling Works, owned by Mr. G. L. Thames was afire. Adjoining this building on one side was Frierson Bros. stand, and on the other an automobile shop, run by June and Blackwell. The fire had gained such head-way, on account of all buildings being of wood, that it looked at one time like the damage would be greater than it was.”*

The Watchman and Southron paper told on **April 19, 1916** that *“Late yesterday afternoon fire broke out in the boiler shed of the Manning Electric Light plant, but the fire department’s prompt and efficient work checked the flames before great damage was done.”*

On **May 10, 1916**, The Manning Times reported on a fireman's injury during a training exercise. *"Mr. Frank Maye, one of Manning's best fire fighters, is able to be out again, after having his collarbone broken and shoulder dislocated in a practice last Wednesday afternoon."* This writer remembers talking with an early fire chief, John Bagnal, as a young boy, and remembering him say that Frank Maye was an outstanding fireman. He was characterized to me as being a big, strong, daring man.

The Manning Times announced on **June 14, 1916** that *"The time for the State Firemen's Association meeting to be held in Orangeburg is drawing close. This convention will be held in Orangeburg on June 20-21-22. The committees have everything in readiness for the convention and the big tournament."*

Manning was visited by the President of the State Firemen's Association on **August 9, 1916** as reported by The Manning Times. *"Chief Louis Behrens of Charleston was in Manning yesterday, and inspected the local fire department, finding everything up-to-date, and far ahead of a great many cities in the State. At night in the court house he lectured to the company and citizens on fire prevention. His talk was very enlightening and full of common sense, which the boys appreciated. Chief Behrens has been sent out to visit a few cities in the State, Manning being one of the chosen places, which is a very high compliment to our city."*

The **August 30, 1916** Manning Times shared that *"Mr. Willie Flowers, who has been truck driver for the Manning Fire Department was taken to Columbia last week for medical examination, and it was discovered that he had an incurable malady, which necessitated his resigning his position with the department."* Later we find through research that Joe Nimmer was appointed to take his place as driver.

On Sunday, **July 22, 1917**, a regular chapter of the American Red Cross society was formerly organized for the county. The organizational

meeting was held in the Court House with much emphasis on supporting the war effort.

The Watchman and Southron paper wrote on **November 17, 1917** that *“About 2 o’clock yesterday morning fire was discovered in the main part of the Manning Oil Mill and burned stubbornly for some time. The fire department responded promptly and succeeded in controlling the flames before great damage was done to the plant. While working on the roof, assisting in directing a stream of water down to the fire, Archie Barron, Jr., made a misstep and fell to the ground, about 20 feet, and was severely stunned. He soon rallied and appears to be much better today.”* This writer, as a very young boy, remembers Archie Barron. His wife, Mrs. Barnwell Barron, was my teacher in the first grade. Their brick home is located on the hill at the corner of Bloomville Road and Hwy. 261, in front of the water tank.

On **November 28, 1917**, The Manning Times tells of the firemen having a big dinner with some excitement after the meal. *“Chief Huggins arose and in a few words of appreciation to the members of the company in which they worked for him during his five years as chief, he tendered his resignation. But as he gave no reason for quitting the boys, his resignation was not accepted until he was asked why he did so, and with a blush, though happiness sparkled in his eyes, he said, ‘I am to be married next Monday.’ Of course, he was then excused from his position, and after wishing him great joys, Mr. Bertram Weinberg was elected to succeed him as chief.”* Chief Huggins served as fire chief from 1912 to 1917.

During the early spring of **1918** the nation was beset by a pandemic known as the “Spanish Flu” which spread across the county and impacted greatly our way of life. So, in addition to fighting a war, our citizens had to deal with a very serious and often deadly virus. Schools, places of amusement, all public gatherings and meetings were closed or discontinued. Quarantines were common and a daily occurrence.

Treatment centers were set up across the state to care for the more seriously ill, and the University of South Carolina even utilized many of its buildings for the sick. The South Carolina State Firemen's Association cancelled its annual conference because of the pandemic and the war effort. In the upstate, we are told that coffins and gravediggers could not be found. Public Health officials estimate that over 50,000 cases were recorded in our state, and over 14,500 of our state's citizens died.

On a happier note, World War I ended on **November 11, 1918**, and we are told that everyone celebrated. The town of Manning was alive with church bells ringing, people dancing in the streets, and our fire engine riding up and down the town with its siren blaring.

The Manning Times reported on **November 19, 1919** that *"The residence of Mr. R. D. Cothran caught fire from the dining room flue last Sunday morning, but by quick work of the fire department there was little damage done."* As a child this writer lived behind R. D. Cothran's residence on Church Street.

According to the **May 26, 1920** edition of The Manning Times, *"The Manning Fire Department will receive through the Firemen's Fund this year \$283.23. This comes from one per cent fire premiums paid in the town of Manning."*

The **April 12, 1922** Manning Times posted, *"The fire department was called out yesterday to extinguish a blaze on the roof of a tenant house in front of the Manning Grocery. The fire did no real damage."*

Then, the **May 3, 1922** issue of The Manning Times told that *"Last Thursday afternoon while driving on the Paxville Road about two miles from Manning, Mr. Oliver Land's automobile caught fire and burned up. Mr. Land carried \$350 insurance on the car."* For those who may not know, Oliver Land was the uncle of former Senator John C. Land. This writer remembers Mr. Oliver very well...my father prepared his income taxes each year. Also, it was told that I. I. Appelt (also owner and editor

of the paper) was named the new fire chief and H. Newman as the truck driver.

Manning's Fire Chief I. I. Appelt placed a notice in The Manning Times on **November 22, 1922** about some safety precautions. *"To prevent fires we advise that all roofs and gutters be cleared off. This time of year leaves in a short while will fill a gutter and flying sparks might fall in this bed of dry leaves and set the house on fire. For your protection do this."*

"FIRE IN MANNING" reads the headlines in The Item on **February 22, 1923**. *"Early this morning fire destroyed the livery stables of Ridgeway & Co., Reardon's blacksmith shop and damaging the residence of J. M. Appelt. Horses, mules, cows and hogs were burned up with a large volume of foodstuffs. The fire spread so rapidly that little work could be done by the fire department. The origin of the fire is not known."*

Manning receives a new fire engine as reported in The Item on **March 10, 1923**. *"The Town Council has invested in a new fire engine with a capacity of 750 gallon per minute pump at a cost of \$12,500. The placing of the new engine in the fire department was considered valuable as so many disastrous fires have recently occurred."* When this writer was about eight years old (1954), I remember this old chain-driven engine parked beside the old wooden fire station on Keitt Street. In my eyes, it was huge...white in color and trimmed in a dark burgundy stripe. I am told it was sold to the Town of Sullivans Island or Folly Beach.

Again, this writer researched the Sanborn Maps of South Carolina and discovered in **April 1923** the population was 2,600 residents. The fire department had progressed considerably since 1912. The department consisted of a chief and paid driver along with 30 volunteers...no mention of two companies; one motorized American LaFrance combination hose and chemical truck having a 40 gallon chemical tank, 2 ladders and 1,000 feet of 2 ½" hose. It also utilizes one "hose

jumper" (hose reel) with 400 feet of 2 ½" hose towed behind engine; 500 feet of hose held in reserve. (**Note:** The town is to have one Seagrave triple combination motor truck having a 750 gpm pump in service by July 1923.)

The town has public lighting; the principal streets are paved; and frame buildings may be erected within the fire limits by permission of city council only. The waterworks were installed in 1914 and had a pumping station on Dinkins Street equipped with a 750 gpm steam pump and one 800 gpm electric pump; a 250,000 gallon reservoir fed by a 6" artesian well 485 feet deep. There was a 100,000 gallon elevated tank (65 ft. steel tower) and about 4 ½ miles of 4" to 10" water pipe with 72 double hydrants.

An interesting description of a fire in Summerton is found in The Watchman and Southron paper printed on **February 24, 1926**. *"A very destructive fire occurred at Summerton last night about 10:30 o'clock. The fire started in the store of J. Shahid, this store, the Hinson hardware store and another building all brick, were consumed by the flames. The Manning Fire Department responded to the call for help and did effective work, considering no water system in Summerton. The big pumper was carried down, and with the aid of the Northwestern train extinguished the fire. The train engine would fill the tender with water from the railroad tank, and the fire engine would pump it out of the tender."*

Manning's first mutual aid call to Sumter is described in the **May 26, 1927** edition of The Item. Interesting though, the request for assistance was cancelled before they left town. *"4 HOUSES RAZED BY WIND-DRIVEN BLAZE."* *"Fire, fanned by a high gale, Wednesday afternoon destroyed one house on Church Street and three on Broad before firemen were able to bring it under control. During the height of the fire help was asked of the Columbia and Manning Fire Departments, and immediate response was given. However, by the time trucks arrived on*

the scene, the fire was under control. The trucks from Columbia covered the 46 miles between that city and Sumter in 50 minutes. The call to Manning was countermanded before their truck started.”

The Watchman and Southron told of near destruction of the Manning fire station in the **December 31, 1927** paper. *“FIRE DEPARTMENT CALLED OUT TO FIGHT BLAZE ON OWN ROOF.” “The siren whistle of the Manning Fire Department gave the alarm Sunday that its own building was on fire. The roof of the annex was ablaze when discovered, probably originating from a defective flue. The engine was rushed out and a stream of water turned on the building, subduing the flame. The loss was fully covered by insurance.”*

At some point in 1936, the Town Council placed an order with the American LaFrance Corporation of Elmira, N. Y., for a 500 gpm fire, triple combination engine built on an open cab, Chevrolet chassis. In 1964 this engine was sold to either Sullivan’s Island or Folly Beach to be used in their fire department. This writer fondly remembers riding on this old engine in Christmas parades and following it to fires on my bicycle. Very recently I learned that this antiquated engine now belongs to the North Naples Fire Department in Florida where it has been restored and is used in their fire prevention programs.

Fires in the mill village and at the lumber company in Alcolu were a fairly frequent occurrence, as noted in The Item on **March 3, 1937**. *“Fire of undetermined origin destroyed approximately seven million feet of hardwood lumber, several storage sheds and one rip (planing) mill of the D. W. Alderman and Sons Lumber Company at Alcolu early this morning. At noon today the fire was still burning but under control. One fire truck of the Sumter Fire Department was called about 5 o’clock and was still at the scene. The Manning Fire Department also responded with one truck.”*

In the book, *“A Little History of the Village of Alcolu,”* by Rev. Robert Lewis Alderman, a great narrative is found on page 44 describing the

mill fire brigade. *“The village fire department consisted of strategically placed hydrants and fire hose carts stored in little shelters throughout the village. These carts were moved to fire scenes by lumber yard tractors driven by mill workers. If tractors were not quickly available the men would often pull and push the carts manually. When the mill whistle sounded first the very eerie fire alarm and then the code signal of the fire’s location, all mill workers with the exception of a safety crew left their positions and rushed to the fire. The village population always gathered for a village fire to fight the fire, to rescue occupants if needed, and to provide assistance for residents. The children gathered to watch with excitement. A fire day in Alcolu was always a frightening time for the entire village.”*

As a young boy and later as a teenager, when the wind was blowing just right, this writer could hear the steam whistle at the mill in Alcolu sounding its signal of fire. In short order the siren on Manning’s fire station would begin blowing followed by old Engine #4 (a 1936 Chevrolet) or Engine #5 (a 1952 Ford) making its run up Brooks Street followed by a procession of cars driven by volunteers heading to Alcolu. Great memories, especially for a youngster whose only real ambition in life was to become a firefighter!!

This writer chooses to suspend further recording of history of the Manning Fire Department at this point in order to gather more research and capture significant recollections of my home-town department. The next edition will likely be in the form of stories and tales, first-hand experiences and reminiscences of the department from the mid-thirties to the present. This has been an interesting project indeed to uncover some of the department’s stories and legacy which may have been lost through time or even forgotten by more current generations. Hopefully this work will be shared with many whose interests and love of the fire service will kindle a desire to keep our legacy alive. History doesn’t stop...it is created with each passing day!

By: Carter H. Jones (September 2020)

