

**Darlington Fire Department**  
**“A History of Tragedy and Triumph....**  
**The First One Hundred Years”**

Darlington, as it became known, is located some 75 miles northeast of the state capital of Columbia and 10 miles from the City of Florence. The county of Darlington was established about 1785 after the area was settled by French Huguenots, Scots-Irish, and the English whose desire was to locate near the Lynches River, Jeffries Creek, and Pee Dee River. Over time other settlers moved into the area bringing farming skills and a vision to create a friendly environment for worship, commerce, and industry.

Very early records from the Darlington archives relate a story (true or not) that suggests the present location of Darlington was due to an argument between Colonel Lamuel Benton and Captain Elias DuBose who argued over where the Courthouse should be built. They argued but compromised on the current site. And, it is reported that *“A fire in March 1806 destroyed the original Courthouse...rumor has it that an older woman, attempting to burn papers connected to her upcoming Court case, was responsible for the fire. The Courthouse was rebuilt between 1824 and 1825 in brick to prevent the spread of fire.”*

A well-written history of the Town of Darlington by Brian Gandy, reveals the village was legally established as a town by an Act of the South Carolina General Assembly in 1835. John King, a prospering man, is said to have given the land to build a courthouse, jail, and lots for future structures in an effort to entice others to invest in the creation of the town. Others who came to settle in Darlington were Joseph Woods, Col. John Smith, Jesse DuBose and Moss Sanders, all successful business people. Darlington archives quotes Robert

Mills, renowned architect, as declaring the town as having a “handsome new brick courthouse and jail; besides several private houses, and the requisite taverns.” **Note: From research of other villages, towns and cities in South Carolina, one can be sure those individuals who settled in Darlington and invested their lives, money, and vision were also concerned about fire protection. Therefore, even though there was not an organized fire brigade to offer protection, these men invested in even the most simple and personal forms of fire protection, ie. buckets, blankets, and ladders.**

While little written history exists regarding fire protection in those early days, a glimpse into the past would very likely reveal the town experienced fairly frequent fires due in large measure to the wooden construction methods of the period. This assumption is based on stories from other villages and towns in the area which share similar accounts about the “*Fire Fiend*.”

Small towns in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century utilized very primitive means to extinguish fires, ie. buckets of water, axes, shovels, blankets, pine tops, and various other limited techniques. The alarm of fire was usually sounded by crude but very effective measures...firing shots into the air from a pistol, shotgun, or rifle which almost always got the attention of neighbors and signaled something was amiss. As churches were built, a town’s people would employ the constant ringing of a bell(s) to alert the citizens of a fire or other emergency in the village.

Fire protection in the 1800s was totally dependent on citizen volunteers to respond to alarms of fire. Not unlike today, fires could more likely be contained and property saved if caught in it’s beginning stages. However, more often than not, volunteers recognized their limitations and got to work trying to remove the

contents of a structure as much as attempting extinguishment. When structures were built close together, fires spread rapidly from house to house, store to store. Often a fire break was attempted by tearing down walls, out-buildings, fences, wooden sidewalks or other structures built with timber in an effort to limit a fire's spread.

Prior to the organization of a fire department, it has been said that fire was the greatest enemy for a community. From South Carolina's earliest beginnings, devastating fires have taken its toll in injury, death, and ruin of property. Out of necessity, these fires brought attention to the need for creative firefighting methods and ordinances needed to prevent and safeguard citizens from unwanted fire.

The author, Nancy Backes, said, *"America had for many years helplessly watched their little wooden towns burn and be rebuilt and burn again."* And, the Town of Darlington was certainly no different as evidenced by the stories found in newspapers of that time. This writer will attempt to chronicle some interesting stories and facts about the Darlington Fire Department...its early beginnings, struggles, leadership, major challenges, and ultimate progression and progress through the subsequent supporting accounts.

On **January 15, 1849**, The Charleston Mercury posted the following on a fire in Darlington. *"Fire in Darlington and Loss of Life."---**"We learn that a fire broke out about half-past ten o'clock on Wednesday night last, at Darlington Village, in the building used as a kitchen and attached to the Darlington Hotel. The fire was not discovered until the entire interior was in flames."* A worker (colored) who had not been able to escape in an attempt to leave the building was *"so severely burnt that he died on the next day. A fine boy, belonging to the same, was burnt to death in the building. A woman was severely burnt, and her recovery is still very doubtful. The Hotel, which was*

*occupied by Mr. James Halford, was several times on fire, but through the active exertions of the citizens was saved, though with great injury. We understand that the merchants, believing the fire would spread, commenced moving their goods and sustained heavy losses from damage; and one of them (Mr. Francks, formerly of this place,) is said to have lost about two thousand dollars in money, which was in a pocket book, and which has been missing since the fire. Much damage was done to the neighboring property, by pulling down out buildings, etc.”*

On **October 10, 1855**, the Edgefield Advertiser apparently had little news to report as evidenced by a brief article from Darlington. *“A pine tree in Darlington district took fire on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of last March, and is said to be still burning. The explanation is, that the fire communicated to the heart of the pine through a hole probably made by a bird, from which the turpentine was exuding. The fire is entirely within, and being fed with air only through this small orifice, it burns very slowly.”*

The Yorkville Enquirer on **December 18, 1856**, picked up a story about a fire first appearing in The Darlington Flag. *“We regret to learn that the house of Dr. S. H. Pressly was entirely consumed by fire on the night of the 2d inst. The family were in attendance at Church when the fire occurred. Nothing was saved except furniture of the parlor and dining-room. The Rev. Mr. Phelps, who was staying with Dr. Pressly at the time, lost something like six hundred dollars worth of books. It is not known how the fire originated.”*

*“Fires in Darlington,”* read the caption of **May 20, 1859** in The Charleston Daily Courier (taken from The Darlington Flag). *“We learn that on Friday, the 6<sup>th</sup> inst., a little before daylight, the barns of Mr. John Young, with their contents, about seven hundred bushels of corn with fodder and shucks, were consumed by fire. There is no*

*doubt that this was the work of an incendiary; developments explaining the origin and cause of this and other fires which have occurred in this district within a year past will soon be made, which will satisfy the minds of the people as to the guilty parties. We learn, too, that on Monday last the steam grist and saw mills belonging to Col. Wm. E. Zimmerman were destroyed by fire. This was purely accidental; we are informed, the particulars have not reached us.”*

On **April 6, 1866**, The Charleston Daily Courier noted the caption, “*Destruction of Darlington Village.*” The article which followed said, “*We devote considerable space in this issue of our paper to an account of the late fire in Darlington Village, whereby some forty buildings were destroyed. Just as we go to press we are informed by a gentleman who has arrived from Darlington District that on Saturday night last the Northern portion of the village, which was left remaining at the late fire, was destroyed. This fire originated by accident; a young man was drawing kerosene oil, and was using a candle, when the oil took fire, and caused a general conflagration. Our informant says every business house in the place, with a number of residences, are destroyed.*”

The Camden Journal of the same date reported that “*Scarcely had the smoldering ruins ceased to give forth heat, ere the flames are again performing their work of destruction at Darlington, and the remaining portion of the square is consumed. We learn that about fifteen buildings were this time consumed, including the entire number of mercantile houses of the town.*” **Note: Some accounts assert the fires were “at the hand of drunken Federal soldiers” who remained in the area after the Civil War when Sherman occupied the town.**

A Columbia newspaper, The Daily Phoenix, printed on **May 6, 1866**, that “*On Sunday last, there were two attempts at setting fire to*

*different parts of that ill-fated village. There can be no doubt that both fires were the works of incendiaries. This is a lamentable state of things. Darlington has had four or five fires within little over a month.”*

The **September 7, 1866** edition of The Charleston Daily Courier shared news from “*The Legislature of South Carolina.*” In that article it is noted news from Darlington that House member “*Mr. Harley presented a petition in relation to the incorporation of a fire company in Darlington.*” The Act was passed to incorporate the Phoenix Fire Engine Company of Darlington. **Note: The request for incorporation of a fire company probably originated in response to complaints from the town’s citizens accelerated by recent major fires and the general deficiency of fire protection within the growing township. Because of the verbiage of the Act, this writer believes there was some undeveloped form of pump or hand-drawn, hand-pumped apparatus already in use and supplied by a bucket brigade for water supplies. The Act made official the intent of the town to shape a more orderly (organized) fire brigade with defined leadership.**

This writer found an article in the Florence Morning News (dated October 14, 1965) which tells an interesting story about fire protection in Darlington shortly after the Civil War. The story in the paper coincides with the above Act of the Legislature in 1866 and is written by the Editor, Thom Anderson. Another article which appears later in this research tells more about Mr. John Woods who later purchased the steam fire engine named “Our Pat.”

The article states “*Shortly after the Civil War, Darlington elected a Confederate veteran to the mayoralty. He was John Woods, an aggressive and progressive man who set out to obtain for Darlington the things it did not have. It was a time of economic hardship for*

*South Carolina, following on the heels of the war and poor state government of Reconstruction.*

*But that didn't bother Woods. He organized the town's first fire department, known as 'The Darlington Fire Brigade.' He was named the first leader of the unit of volunteers. Woods and his men in case of fire set up bucket lines all of us have seen in movies, but few of us have seen in reality. They pulled a homemade ladder truck loaded with emergency equipment, including the buckets. When they reached a fire, they found an open well or pump—or were helpless." The story continues that "the town built a 5,000-gallon under-ground water tank near the northwest corner of the courthouse."*

The Charleston Mercury picked up a story from Darlington dated **December 8, 1866** which said, *"A fire took place at Darlington, on Monday night, which burned down a store occupied by C. B. Law and E. Charles. Loss \$5,000, and insurance \$4,000. The cause of the fire was accidental."*

The Charleston Mercury newspaper of **November 2, 1867** reported *"Major Eaves' gin house, about five miles from this place, was consumed by fire on Saturday night last, with some thirteen bales of cotton. Supposed to be the work of an incendiary."*

A **June 29, 1868** printing of The Charleston Mercury printed that *"The storehouse of Mr. Matthew A. Waldrow (where the murder and robbery was committed on the night of the 10<sup>th</sup> January last), was set on fire on Friday night, and the whole building consumed with all its contents. Supposed to be the act of an incendiary."*

The Charleston Daily Courier of **November 2, 1868** published *"By some means, the bedding of some in a house on the premises of Mrs. Jane Campbell, in Darlington, took fire last Wednesday night*

*about ten o'clock, and the whole of it was consumed without injury to the building. Some little children were in the bed when it caught, but were rescued in time."*

The Charleston Daily Courier, dated **April 1, 1869**, conveyed that *"Thursday night, being the anniversary, was duly celebrated by the Phoenix Fire Company, of Darlington Courthouse, assisted by the colored Hook and Ladder Company. At the regular annual meeting the following officers were elected to serve the ensuing year: President, B. A. Early; Vice President, John Floyd; First Director, Thos. Gillespie; Second Director, H. Hymes; Secretary and Treasurer, A. Weinburg; Engineer, R. Dewit; Surgeon, C. M. Parker, M.D.; First Axman, S. Jordon; Second Axman, J. E. Russell."* **Note: The Phoenix Fire Company most likely operated a hand-drawn, hand-pumped apparatus which probably was purchased used from one of the larger cities, ie. Charleston. Most small towns were unable to afford new apparatus, ie. "Our Pat" which was purchased used from Charleston in 1882.**

**Also, reference is made in the article about the position/rank of "Axman" (or "Axeman"). This meaning of this position seems to have been lost to time and generations. The designation is found throughout fire service history, but few today understand its meaning or significance. In an article which appeared in the October 11, 1924 edition of the State newspaper presents a clear description of the Axman's role in fighting a fire. The description follows and reference is made to "bridge burners" in labeling Axmen.**

***"In olden times the steam fire engine companies elected axemen and chopping wood for the engines at big fires were a part of their duties. Each steamer carried a tender loaded with fuel (coal or wood) and when he supply was exhausted axemen***



*would tear up bridges over drains, chop the timber into small pieces and the firemen would feed the boiler to hold the steam. Axemen were no respecter of persons. They would not hesitate on moment to remove a bridge from in front of the mayor's house or the place the chief of police resided, if the engine needed fuel."*

*However, in 1869 the Darlington Fire Brigade did not possess a steam fire engine, so, obviously the brigade made the position of "Axeman" to perform similar work, ie. tearing down fences, wooden sidewalks, outbuildings, or walls in order to slow or prevent the spread of fire to exposures.*

The **November 5, 1869** edition of The Charleston Daily Courier announced that *"We learn that the barn of Mr. W. P. Gee, containing six thousand pounds of fodder and about two hundred bushels of choice cotton seed, was destroyed by fire early in the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> ult. The fire was undoubtedly the work of incendiaries. The torch is very convenient."*

The Yorkville Enquirer wrote that *"About one o'clock last Monday morning the most destructive fire with which that place has ever visited, occurred in Darlington. The fire originated in a kitchen, and spread so rapidly that nearly an entire block of buildings was destroyed before the flames were subdued. The entire loss is estimated at from \$100,000 to \$150,000, on which there was light insurance."*

The Daily Phoenix of Columbia, dated **February 20, 1870**, reported that the State Legislature had a bill introduced to incorporate *"the Darlington Hook and Ladder Company as a part of the fire department of the Town of Darlington."* **Note: The Hook & Ladder apparatus mentioned was initially a hand-drawn wagon which**

carried an assortment of ladders, axes, shovels, blankets (for wetting down roofs), hooks and chains for pulling down unstable walls, water buckets, and eventually 2 ½ gallon soda/acid portable extinguishers.

Still another fire in Darlington was noted on **April 29, 1870** in The Charleston Daily News. *“On Sunday morning last, Mr. Abel Gandy lost his barn by fire. The entire contents, consisting of about 1000 bushels of corn and 200 bushels of peas, were consumed, together with several four horse wagons and a carriage. We are informed that this severe loss was certainly the work of an incendiary.”*

An edition of The Darlington Southerner was picked up by The Charleston Daily News on **February 1, 1871** that *“The blacksmith shops of Messrs. W. D. Lewis and J. S. Floyd were destroyed by fire on last Saturday night. The fire originated in Mr. Lewis’s shop, which adjoined Mr. Floyd’s, from new coal, which contained fire.”*

The Daily Phoenix of Columbia, wrote on **December 25, 1873**, that *“Tuesday morning, about 4 o’clock, a fire broke out on the square of the town of Darlington, which destroyed the store and hotel of Mr. John Floyd, the house of Mr. M. Welsh, occupied by Mr. C. Kerrigan and by Mr. John W. Williamson, the store of Mr. J. F. Early and the store of Mr. S. Marco. Loss about \$23,000, with about \$10,000 covered by insurance. The fire is thought to have been accidental, and originated in the building occupied by Mr. Kerrigan.”*

The Yorkville Enquirer, printed on **May 18, 1876**, that *“About one o’clock last Monday morning the most destructive fire with which that place has ever visited, occurred in Darlington. The fire originated in a kitchen, and spread so rapidly that nearly an entire block of buildings was destroyed before the flames were subdued.*

*The entire loss is estimated at from \$100,000 to \$150,000, on which there was light insurance.”*

According to The Newberry Weekly Herald, dated **January 10, 1877**, said *“Last night, about 12 o’clock, another attempt was made to burn down the town of Darlington. Fire was simultaneously set to the town in three places. The building occupied by the Southerner (newspaper) and Marco’s stables were destroyed. This was the fourth attempt made to destroy the town since the Presidential election, and only six months before the election, a fire broke out which caused the loss of \$70,000. No county in the State has suffered as severely by incendiarism as Darlington has, and the whole responsibility is believed to rest upon Senator B. F. Whittemore.”*

**Note: The following article appeared in the October 16, 1949 edition of the Florence Morning News and is here copied verbatim to maintain chronological uniformity. The article, written by Kenneth M. James, provides a detailed account of the “reorganization” of the Darlington Fire Department back in 1880. “Old ‘Our Pat’ Fire Engine Symbolizes History Of Department At Darlington,” reads the caption.**

*“in the year 1880, John Woods was elected mayor of Darlington. Young Woods had enlisted in the Confederate Army at the age of 17 and fought the last two years of the war in the company headed by his brother, Andrew Woods.”*

*“John Woods returned home when the war ended and, after finishing his education at Wofford College, became a member of the firm S. A. Woods and Son. He saw Darlington pass through the tragic era of Reconstruction and was a leader in the Wade Hampton movement. One of the first things John Woods did, after becoming mayor, was to*

*form a fire department for the town of Darlington. This was the first organization of the kind to fight local fires. It began as a social club and was called the Darlington Fire Brigade. All eligible young men were invited to join and, at the same time, become fire fighters. Woods became the first president.”*

*“Up to this time, whenever a building caught fire the owners stood by and watched the flames destroy their property. Only the small boys of the town attempted to put the fire out and did it more as an adventure than a serious undertaking. No insurance was ever carried on buildings. The new firemen’s club constructed a home-made ladder wagon which was pulled by hand. Hanging from the sides of the wagon were a number of buckets. These were filled with water and passed from man to man up the ladders and the water was tossed on the fire. Lucky was the owner of property on fire who had an open well, or pump, on the premises. The ladder wagon was kept under the steps of the old court house.”*

*“In **1882**, Mayor Woods and the town council purchased from the City of Charleston a fire engine. This engine was run by steam with a rotary pump. It was put in the sole charge of Engineer John Early. The name of the engine at that time was ‘Young America.’ On the fifth of January, 1882, Mayor and Mrs. Woods’ only daughter was born. She was named Martha DuBose Woods, but the family called her ‘Pat.’”*

*“Martha was the first girl to be born in the Woods family in 27 years. The Woods progeny ran to boys. So there was great rejoicing over this little girl and, being the daughter of the popular mayor, she became known as ‘the town’s baby.’”*

*“John Woods took great pride in the fire brigade, the honor of being its president ranked next to the honor of being mayor. The purchase*

*of the fire engine was a progressive step for a town the size of Darlington and caused decided excitement. When the engine arrived the population here assembled on the square to see it steamed up.”*

*“At a joint meeting of the town council and the firemen a motion was passed to change the name of the fire engine from ‘Young America’ to ‘Our Pat’, in honor of Mayor Woods’ little daughter.”*

*“‘Miss Pat,’ as she is affectionately known to her friends, became Mrs. Weldon F. Twitty. She takes great pride and pleasure in visiting the fire department and showing her grandchildren the fire engine named for her when she was a little girl. Today the silver marker may still be seen on the old steamer, bearing the inscription, ‘Our Pat.’”*

*“When the engine was first used in Darlington there was no overhead water tank. An underground reservoir was constructed on the northwest corner of the court house green, but, to fill the reservoir, ‘Our Pat’ was driven to Swift Creek Bridge. There, water was pumped through lines of fire hose in the reservoir which held 5,000 gallons. The reservoir is still beneath the ground today. Above it grows a bed of azaleas.”*

*“In 1886, Mayor Woods died, much to the sorrow of his family and the people of Darlington. He was the town’s first progressive mayor and was beloved by all who knew him. The organization of Darlington’s first fire department is one of the splendid monuments he left.”*

*“After Mayor Woods’ death the term ‘president’ of the fire department was changed to ‘chief.’ The late Caesar Alexander, who had had considerable experience with the Charleston Fire Department, succeeded Woods as ‘chief.’ Others who have followed*

*as head of the organization were the late Bright Williamson, Marion Bonnoit, T. Frazer James, W. S. Truett and Robert T. Kern. The newest chief is Frank W. Drake.”* **Research records that in 1866, The Phoenix Fire Engine Co. was “officially” incorporated in Darlington, and 1869 there is mention of a colored Hook & Ladder Company in existence. So, one would assume the work of Mayor Woods was an action of accomplishment to “reorganize” what were two outmoded and inefficient organizations attempting to provide fire protection for the growing Town of Darlington.**

A search of the Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. of their survey of the Town of Darlington published in **June 1884** reveals a glimpse of fire protection of that era. The findings show the town had a population of about 1,200 people; the fire department consisted of one steam engine, one hand engine, and the town’s water facilities were “*not good.*” The steam fire engine was housed in a building shared with City Hall and Police office located in the public square in front of the County Court House offices. Situated in the public square were three “*fire wells*” with one located at the corner of Grove and Pearle streets, and a “*fire cistern*” located on Orange street near McIves street. Also, located throughout the town were a number of private wells.

The Fairfield News and Herald, dated **October 28, 1885**, noted “*At Darlington last Wednesday night fire was discovered in the restaurant of Houston & Woodham, and before it could be checked, caused a loss of \$50,000, distributed among the following named business men: J. A. Pearce, J. C. White, A. Nachman, S. Marco and M. Hinley. Their loss is on stock. Heyward & Josey and Houstin & Woodham lost buildings and stock.*”

Records from the Florence Morning News reveal a story about an earthquake which occurred on the night of **August 31, 1886**. A Mr. Horace Fraser Rudisill co-edited for the Darlingtonian newspaper in which he said, *“His clock stopped a 10 minutes to 10 with the first shock and four strong shocks followed. People ran out of houses, seeking safety on the town square. The Darlington Courthouse walls were cracked and the tremors rang the fire bell. The Enterprise Hotel had plaster fall, as did many residences. A fire was started in one house when a lamp fell, but it was smothered under a wet quilt.”*

Five years later, in **January 1889**, the town was again surveyed by the Sanborn Map Co. whose inspection showed some improvements to Darlington’s fire protection. The fire department had added 1,000 ft. of good 2 ½” *“linen hose.”* Additionally, the steam engine and other apparatus was located a block away from the public square near the new city hall and an artesian well with *“inexhaustible”* supply of water. In addition to the existing fire wells around the Court House, two *“fire cisterns”* had been added to improve fire protection.

The **February 6, 1889** edition of The Manning Times printed *“The Town of Darlington had a \$9000 fire on the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> ult. Floyd’s store, the express office, C. W. Hewitt’s stables, the county jail, and a small house of B. W. Edwards, were the buildings destroyed. They were insured for about two-thirds their estimated value. The prisoners in the jail, twenty-one in number, were taken out and put in the guard house.”*

The Watchman and Southron of Sumter, dated **April 17, 1889**, wrote an interesting commentary about sounding the alarm of fire in Darlington. *“The Sumter Watchman and Southron comments humorously upon methods now employed to arouse the citizens of Darlington in the event of a fire, and affords our worthy ‘City Fathers’ some excellent food for thought. That estimable journal is mistaken,*

*however, in asserting that when a fire breaks out, the leading citizens of the town raise their front windows and discharging their pistols in the air. No, indeed; the leading citizens of the town, who have proper regard for the welfare of their lives and limbs, retire to their residences with their families, and shut all the doors and windows, for fear some stray bullet may seek them out; the firing is done by the 'hip-pocket' fellows, a perfect army of which gallant gentlemen infest our town."*

The Abbeville Press and Banner reported on **December 31, 1890** that *"A fire in Darlington on the night of December 15, caused a loss of property valued at about \$75,000. The following persons lost either houses or merchandise: A. S. McIver & Co., A. C. Spain & Co., G. W. Dargan, D. W. Waters, P. C. Beck & Co., A. Nachman, S. Tombacker, J. Bellenson, R. L. Dargan & Co., Dr. J. A. Boyd, J. J. Ward. The Southern Express Office with its contents was destroyed."*

Continuing the above story from The Watchman and Southron on **December 17, 1890**, *"Fire broke out at 10 o'clock on Monday night in the two story building of A. C. Spain & Co. The engines for some reason did not render immediate assistance and the destruction of property was considerable. The sparks caused several buildings in various parts of the town to catch, but they were promptly extinguished. Florence was wired for assistance, which was gallantly given, their boys coming in with cheers and were greeted with cheers at 12:00 o'clock. A sad occurrence was the death of Mr. James Fountain, which was very sudden and was caused by over exertion. Mr. J. H. Early met with a serious accident also."*

The Abbeville Press and Standard, dated **November 18, 1891**, reported that *"A fire in Darlington, Nov. 4, at 4 p.m., caused it is supposed, a loss of \$30,000 in buildings and damage to goods."*



The Watchman and Southron wrote about the same fire...*”At 4:30 p.m. fire broke out in M. Manne’s store. It spread radildly in both directions, and in a few minutes the whole south side of Pearl street, between Broadway and Grove streets, was in flames. The prompt action of the fire department prevented a more disastrous fire.”*

*“DARLINGTON WATER WORKS,”* headlined from The Watchman and Southron of **November 18, 1891**. *“The fire which visited Darlington last week has proven one thing, the efficiency of the water works. It was the first occasion since the works were erected that they could be put to a test and the result was most satisfactory. The force with which the water was thrown from the hydrants enabled the citizens to throw several streams on the burning buildings. Had it not been for the large supply of water it would be difficult to tell where the conflagration would have stopped. The fire did a great deal of damage, but it would have done much more had it not been for the efficiency of the water works. This adjunct to the fire department cannot be too lightly appreciated.”*

The **March 2, 1892** edition of The Watchman and Southern newspaper of Sumter noted a major fire occurred in Darlington. *“Darlington suffered one of the largest and most disastrous fires on last Saturday night in the history of that place. The fire originated in Early’s store about 9 o’clock, and the wind being high the entire wooden portion of the square was soon in flames. The firemen did their utmost but it was impossible to check the flames. The Florence fire department was telegraphed for and responded promptly, but it was an unequal struggle and the fire burned itself out. The loss is estimated at \$150,000, and insurance \$117,000.”* On the same date, The Rock Hill Herald also noted that *“Verily the fire king is having a royal time in this State.”* The Keowee Courier reported the next day that *“The Florence firemen went to Darlington,*

*a distance of ten miles, and were at work in forty-seven minutes after starting from home.”*

On **January 11, 1893**, The Watchman and Southron paper said, *“There was a fire in Darlington on Monday night. Five buildings were burned; loss \$2,000.”*

Darlington was once again inspected by the Sanborn Map Co. I **November 1893**. This survey demonstrated even more improvements to the fire protection of the town. The fire department consisted of a number of volunteer firemen who operated one *“Silsby steamer..3<sup>rd</sup>Class,”* one *“Hook & Ladder Truck,”* 2 hose carts with 1,200 ft. of hose, a *“Smithvail pump”* on the artesian well which could pump 250 gallons per minute, an *“elevated tank”* which contained 30,000 gallons of water, 7 one way hydrants with an average pressure of 45 lbs., 2 large cisterns in the Court House Square with a capacity of *“50,000 gals. each.”* The population is said to have been around 2,300 people.

The Manning Times wrote about a Darlington fire in their **February 27, 1895** printing. *“The warehouse and prize room of the Darlington Tobacco company, were destroyed by fire yesterday morning about four o’clock. The warehouse was all ablaze when the watchman sounded the alarm and it burned like tinder. The prize rooms stored tobacco were very near and these with their contents were also entirely destroyed. It is not know how the fire originated and the loss will be over ten thousand dollars, only partially covered by insurance.”*

The Southern Christian Advocate of **January 7, 1897** reported briefly that a *“Large fire in Darlington, stores of Blackwell Bros., Strauss & Roseen, J. H. Early, the dispensary, W. C. Byrd and offices of Boyd & Brown, Nettles & Nettles, Dr. C. B. Graham and others, destroyed.*

*Loss about \$75,000.” Also, the brief notice states that “Jim May, colored, who was hurt by a ladder breaking at Darlington fire, died of his injury.”*

The **February 3, 1897** edition of The Watchman and Southron of Sumter reported *“The Planters’ Tobacco Ware House was destroyed by fire at 9 o’clock last night. The building, with office fixtures and many lots of leaf tobacco, belonging to various planters, was a total loss. A defective flue caused the fire, and only the hardest kind of work by the bucket brigade prevented adjacent buildings from being destroyed.”*

On **July 12, 1899**, The Aiken Standard printed *“Fire last Saturday destroyed the long stables at the Darlington Tobacco warehouse, the grocery warehouse of Coggeshall & Co., with its contents, and came near burning the Darlington Tobacco warehouse and the new roller flour mill. Just how the fire originated is a mystery. An engine at the depot pulled the 20 or more cars that were standing on the side track away out of danger and thus saved much property, for some of the cars were loaded and they were very close to the burning buildings. Only the hardest work on the part of citizens managed to save the roller mill and probably two or three tobacco buildings from the flames.”*

*“FLORENCE IN RUINS,”* read the headlines of The Time and Democrat on **December 27, 1899**. *“Bare walls and masses of debris mark the business portion of Florence. It was the greatest fire that ever visited Florence, and one from which it will be difficult to recover very soon, for many of the losses fall heavily on the victims. The fire started in the City hotel, a handsome three-story building, and this was burned to the ground before the flames began to spread. The water supply was inadequate, and just when it was thought the fire could be controlled, the engines ceased pumping*

*and pandemonium reigned. Bucket brigades were formed and heroic work was done, but all to no avail. The Florence fire department did excellent work but were hindered by the lack of water. Darlington responded promptly to the call for aid and arrived within one hour after the special train had been sent by Capt. G. G. Lynch. The Darlington firemen did good work, and for their assistance the people of Florence are grateful.”*

On **December 31, 1902**, The Watchman and Southron paper noted that *“At 7 o’clock tonight an alarm of fire caused considerable excitement when it was ascertained that the Nachman block, in the center of the business part of town, was burning. The fire was in the basement and smoke came in such volumes as almost made effective work impossible. Chief Dargan, Fire Chief James and white and colored firemen did splendid work. Five streams, from engines and hydrants, at last extinguished the flames after the store and stock were seriously damaged.”*

In **April 1903**, the town once again contracted the Sanborn Map Co. to provide another survey for insurance and protection purposes. It was noted that the volunteer firemen now *“receive a small remunerations for attending fires.”* Additionally, it was discovered that the department was comprised of *“15 white men, the other 12 colored men,”* and the town owned a third hose cart which brought the department’s total amount of hose to 2,200 ft. *“of good standard hose.”*

The State newspaper, dated **May 23, 1908**, printed the commentary about the State Firemen’s Association tournament being held in Darlington. *“The tournament to be held in Darlington, July 1, 2 and 3. The fourth annual convention of the South Carolina State Firemen’s association will be held at the same time. The tournament will be under the auspices of the Darlington fire*

*department and the citizens of Darlington. The officers of the entertainment committee are: Mayor C. B. Edwards, Chief T. Fraser James, and Mr. E. C. Dennis, chairman.” We are told the meeting of the Association was held in the Court House auditorium at 11 a. m.*

The State newspaper of **June 10, 1908** complimented the Darlington Fire Department on its preparations to host the State Firemen’s Association convention during the Fourth of July celebrations.

*“Darlington has, beyond question, one of the fine fire departments of South Carolina. A hand engine, a Silsby steamer and the latest combination of a steam and chemical engine completes the equipment with reel and hose wagons, of course. Spartanburg alone has another engine like the one here used, and it has been officially remarked to your correspondent that comparatively speaking, only Columbia and Charleston are ahead of Darlington in its important consideration of a complete department. The alarm is a fine Gamewell plant, the best in use and this is as complete as could be desired, covering the town even as is done in the largest cities.”*

The article continues, *“A splendid system of waterworks gives the finishing touches and fine quarters are included also. The large two-story brick building has the usual lower story departments and above are rooms where four firemen sleep every night. A splendid pair of \$800 dapple-grays, used by the United States government at the Jamestown exposition, have recently been purchased and Chief Garrison, in charge, keeps them even as much a fine fellow can keep such a fine team.”*

About the upcoming firemen’s tournament in Darlington, The State also reported on **June 30, 1908** that *“The Atlantic Coast Line has named exceedingly low rates for the Firemen’s Tournament at Darlington, July 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>, tickets being on sale and good to return until July 6<sup>th</sup>.”*

In **July 1908**, the Sanborn Map Co. once again provided a glimpse of improvements to the town's fire department. In addition to the apparatus already on hand from previous years, the town purchased one "*combination chemical hose cart*," and noted that "*three men sleep in the station at nights...one man on duty days. Two horses. Gamewell fire alarm system, ten boxes.*" The water system had improved significantly with an additional cistern on Court House Square having 30,000 gals., and "*50 hydrants and nine miles of pipe.*" **Note: The "combination chemical hose cart" was likely a horse-drawn wagon having one or two 40 gal. soda-acid tanks (early booster concept) along with a large hose bed for laying hose from hydrants. And, the Gamewell Fire Alarm boxes installed were the invention of John Nelson Gamewell who was a Camden, S. C. native who perfected the electric telegraph alarm systems in 1855. Mr. Gamewell was also Camden's post master, telegraph operators, reporter and handyman for the Camden newspaper, and officer with the early Camden Fire Department.**

The **November 5, 1908** printing of The Pickens Sentinel reported that "*Fire on Wednesday morning destroyed a large tobacco warehouse on east Broad street. This building had been used for storing cotton and there were 204 bales of cotton in it at the time of the fire, all of which was destroyed. The origin of the fire is unknown. One of the Atlantic Coast Line passenger coaches, which had been sent up as a special for the delegates of the T. P. A. to the progress meeting at Columbia, was burned.*"

The Edgefield Advertiser on **April 28, 1909** penned an article which said, "*Fire Monday morning about 1 o'clock destroyed the large barn of Mr. E. O. Woods of the local bar, in the rear of his residence on Cashua street, together with a buggy and a carriage. The fire also came near killing a horse in the stable. This makes the third fire in Darlington in less than two weeks, no one of which has destroyed*

*more than \$1,000 worth of property. The work of the local fire department is largely creditable for this, and it can not be too highly praised. Monday morning two streams of water were playing on the building ten minutes after the alarm was turned in.”*

In the **June 13, 1909** edition of The State newspaper, an article was written about the Darlington firemen. *“The firemen of town are putting in hard practice for the tournament in Union this year. Last year the annual tournament was held in Darlington and the department had the hard luck in every race of falling down, getting hose tangled or accidents of similar nature, which shut them off from the prize. They are determined, however, that no lack of training this year will be responsible for keeping them from success.”*

The Watchman and Southron printed on **April 9, 1910** told *“Fire completely destroyed the Methodist parsonage, located on Orange street, today, burning from about 12:30 o’clock until about 3. The origin is not known, but it is supposed to have started in the roof from a defective flue. The house was in close touch to a number of large residences on either side and across the street, and for a while it seemed that probably others would take fire. The work of the firemen, however, confined the flames to the one building.”*

The Fort Mill Times of **June 15, 1911** noted that *“Interest in the firemen’s tournament and the seventh annual convention of the South Carolina State Firemen’s Association, which will be held in Columbia on June 27, 28, and 29, is daily increasing, as evidenced by the number of inquiries for information that are swelling the mail of Chief W. J. May, chairman of the committee on arrangements, T. F. James, fire chief of Darlington, and O. K. Laroque, chief of the fire department at Marion, were in the city to consult with Mr. May. Both of these cities will be represented by teams in the tournament contest and in the sessions of the association.”*

The Times and Democrat of Orangeburg posted on **June 17, 1911** that *“During a heavy storm Monday afternoon lightning struck a barn and stable belonging to C. N. Oates, between Lamar and Darlington, burning the building with its contents, which included two fine mules. During the storm the corn and tobacco crops of a number of farmers in the same community were literally torn to shreds.”*

Sad news coming out of Darlington as printed by The State newspaper of **November 9, 1911**. *“DARLINGTON FIRE LADS LOSE THEIR HORSE ‘MAC,’”* read the caption. *“Mac,” the big bay horse that has been connected with the fire department in Darlington almost continuously since the fire ladies have had a wagon drawn by horses, and at various times a prize winner for the Darlington department, died last night. ‘Mac’ was known all over the State, and the rival departments were always afraid of his speed. He commenced his racing career in Florence in 1908 with his mate, ‘Billy.’ These two horses won over several competitions in two-horse reel races. In 1909, at Union, however, ‘Mac’ demonstrated the fact that he could make much better time by himself. The following year in Sumter his record was maintained, and at the last tournament in Columbia the Darlington team brought home \$250 won by their great horse. He took second prize in the State race, \$100; third in the interstate, \$50; and first in the handicap, \$100.”*

The article continues... *“Mac’ was bought by the late Mayor C. S. McCullough in 1906 in Atlanta. He had been thoroughly broken to fire department work and was one of the first pair of fire horses ever owned by Darlington. In 1908, because his mate had been injured, ‘Mac’ was sold to I. Lewenthal, who used him for some time as a buggy horse. Later, the members of the department purchased him back from Mr. Lewenthal at a price of \$300, the money being made up by contributions of the firemen, and the horse belonged to the*



*individual members of the department. However, he was kept in regular service and responded to most of the fires during the past few months.”*

According to the **January 1913** survey of Darlington by the Sanborn Map Co., the population was now around 5,000 people. The town’s water system had greatly improved with installation of a larger elevated tank pumped by two steam pumps having a capacity of 500 gallons of water per minute. The town laid 13 miles of cast iron water pipe with 76 hydrants. The fire department had several partly paid men...”*one chief. One assistant. 15 call men and three permanent men (white) also one company of 15 colored men. Five horses.”* The department added “*one combination hose and chemical wagon” with “3,000 ft. 2 ½” rubber lined hose in good condition.” Gamewell fire alarm system, 10 boxes. Signal on City Hall. Streets not paved. Public lights electric.”*

A story from the Yorkville Enquirer, dated **October 13, 1914**, tells a horrible story about the Cheraw fire bell which should interest any reader. “*Reese Hough, a prominent citizen of Cheraw, met instant death about 12 o’clock Friday night, while ringing the town fire bell. Mr. Hough had discovered fire in a store and went to give the alarm. While doing this the fire bell, which was stationed at the top of a water tank, 150 feet high, and which weighed 700 pounds, fell on him. His body was horribly mangled.”*

The **January 6, 1915** edition of The Abbeville Press and Banner wrote “*Fire in Jackson’s garage on Gargan street caused the destruction of 16 automobiles and damaged the building. By prompt and efficient work the fire was soon extinguished by the department. The main damage is confined to the building and the machines stored in it. Mr. Jackson, the proprietor of the garage, was trying to start his car and the gasoline from his carburetor leaked on the floor. When his car*

*started this gasoline was ignited and the whole building burst in flames.”*

On **May 5, 1915**, The Watchman and Southron printed that *“The boys of Darlington fire department have purchased a horse and are now training hard for the meet in Greenwood the latter part of this month. The new horse is a good one and the boys are expecting to bring back more than their share of the prizes. Darlington has a fire department of which it is justly proud.”*

The Watchman and Southron newspaper of Sumter reported on **January 26, 1916** that *“The new high-power motor fire truck purchased by the council several weeks ago will arrive about February 1, according to a letter recently received from the builders of the apparatus. This truck is of the latest design, and will put the local fire department in the front rank in the matter of equipment.”*

*“Cotton Fire at Darlington,”* read the caption in The Watchman and Southron paper of **April 5, 1919**. *“Fire of unknown origin discovered in the warehouses adjoining the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad station early tonight destroyed over 1,000 bales of cotton in the warehouses and on the platform adjoining. It was late in the night before the fire was under control after the warehouses and platform, 400 feet in length had been completely destroyed. The fire had gained much headway before it was discovered by citizens.”*

The **June 26, 1921** edition of The Times and Democrat of Orangeburg noted that *“Fire broke out Wednesday about 1 o’clock in the storage sheds of Owen-Woodward company gasoline filling station, and but for the quick work on the part of the Darlington fire department, it would have been a very serious blaze.”*

The Sunday Record of **April 23, 1922** featured an article about the Darlington Fire Department. *“Like one big family is the way the Darlington Volunteer Fire Department has been described by a citizen of the community protected by it. And a very efficient big family it is, too. The truth of this statement is borne out by the fact that Darlington is said to have the second lowest rate of fire insurance among the towns in South Carolina. That speaks for itself.”*

The article continues *“At the head of the fire department family in Darlington is W. S. Truett, a prominent business man, who has held his official position as chief for the past ten years. A number of the present fire forces have also held their positions as volunteers for several years. R. L. Stoudner probably is the veteran of longest service. C. N. Douglas is the assistant chief and Arthur Blackwell is secretary-treasurer. Situated just off the public square is the fire department headquarters, in a large and well equipped building. The entire service is motorized with four vehicles, including a Seagrave pump and ladder truck. Through long service every member of the force is always promptly on hand when a fire alarm is sounded and catch the fire trucks as they come out. Several members of the department also make their sleeping quarters at the fire department and thus making it certain that a prompt start may be made during the night hours.”*

*“The Gamewell automatic alarm boxes are stationed at all points of the city for sending in calls, being the same type of alarm used in Charleston, Columbia and other cities. All the fire department tournaments for the state are attended by Darlington department, their presence being very much felt at the last state tournament in Columbia when they took three prizes in various events. The total number of men on the fire department force is approximately 25. The regulars are as follows: W. S. Truett, chief; G. N. Douglas,*

*assistant chief; Arthur Blackwell, secretary-treasurer; A. Gainey, R. L. Stoudener, P. C. Council, G. C. Rhodes, B. D. Bouknight, T. D. Young, J. D. Gillespie, R. B. Byrd, G. C. Hubbard, G. Bostick, W. J. Oakes.”*

The Sumter newspaper printed on **December 30, 1922** that *“Fire of unknown origin here tonight about 7 o’clock damaged a store room and fourteen bales of cotton that were stored in it. The building and cotton is owned by K. Simon and it is thought to have been insured. Good work by the fire department prevented the damage from being greater.”*

The **November 19, 1925** printing of the Florence Morning News described a large fire in Darlington with the caption *“FIRE CAUSES BIG DAMAGE IN THE HEART OF BUSINESS SECTION OF DARLINGTON.”* *“Fire estimated to have caused at least one hundred thousand dollars damage practically destroyed two large mercantile establishments in Darlington yesterday and threatened others and it was only by the fine work of the Darlington department assisted by the Florence fire department that the conflagration did not assume more serious proportions. As it was the Coggeshall Hardware Company and the W. D. Coggeshall Company, the latter a large department store, both had their buildings destroyed before the flames were brought under control. The Hill Hospital, however, was considerably damaged.”*

The Item of Sumter reported on **May 18, 1927** that a fire of *“unknown origin”* badly damaged a number of residences, shops, storage houses as well as contents. *“This is one of the largest fires in Darlington in a number of years and only the fine work by the fire department prevented greater damage. The dense smoke drew a crowd of spectators.”*

According to a brief article in the **May 25, 1927** edition of The Watchman and Southron paper, *“Fire that started in an upstairs closet from wiring today caused serious loss and damage to the fine residence of J. K. Kirven on Broad street. The flames gave the fire fighters stubborn resistance and only good work by the department kept the loss down.”*

The **June 24, 1927** edition of The Herald of Rock Hill, printed an account of the recent State Firemen’s Association convention in that city. *“Selection of Rock Hill as the convention city for 1928 and the election of officers for next year featured the closing day of the annual convention of the South Carolina Firemen’s Association here yesterday. With one exception all officers were re-elected. The one new officer named was W. Sam Truett, chief of the Darlington fire department, who was elected second vice president.”*

The Florence Morning News of **February 22, 1928** noted a reorganization of the Darlington Fire Department. *“At a meeting of the Darlington fire department held recently the department was reorganized under the new chief, Robert T. Kern and several new members elected to the organization. In the reorganization the following officers were elected: Frank Drake, assistant chief; Jacob Robinson, captain; C. N. Chandler, secretary-treasurer, and A. E. Blackwell, truck driver. The new members elected were: J. C. Stone, J. K. Hall, C. J. Davis, R. G. Pittman and Gana Bostick. The old members of the department, in addition to the officers are. T. H. Gilcarist, J. R. Gilcarist, H. B. Tarte, R. F. Hutchinson, and Dan Milsaps. The town of Darlington is very proud of the efficient department and it is expected that the department will continue their fine work under the direction of the chief, Kern.”*

The Columbia Record of **April 1, 1930** printed *“No trace had been found up until noon today of the body of Mrs. J. T. Wright, 70, missing*

*guest in the Darlington hotel, which along with other buildings was destroyed in one of the most destructive fires ever experienced in Darlington. Governor John G. Richards this morning wired O. A. Alexander, mayor of Darlington, expressing his sympathy for the loss and offering assistance in any way. This was one of the most destructive fires ever experienced in Darlington. Fire department officials estimated the total damage to be around \$250,000 of which more than a third is said to be covered by insurance. The fire badly wrecked the entire south side of the public square, the corner drug store, Doyles Barber shop, Blackwells shoe store, Langstons Men's store, Welling and Bonnoitts Hardware store. On Main street Ideal plant and Cycle works, Motropole and Holiday wholesale fruit house and George Metroples ice cream plant were destroyed."*

The **August 4, 1932** edition of The Columbia Record announced *"Darlington's fire department will be the cause of a half holiday Friday, when the department plans to give a series of demonstrations on the school grounds. Most of the stores will close during the afternoon. The firemen's demonstration will be preceded by a parade through town, in which the firemen, state highway patrolmen, and local policemen will participate. The fire hoses will be turned over to the town's boys for a free-for-all water fight after the main events are over."*

The Columbia Record printed on **September 26, 1932** reported *"The second disastrous fire in Darlington's public square within recent years early Monday morning almost totally destroyed a building housing a jewelry shop, shoe shop and grocery store. The damage to the building was estimated at \$25,000, and the loss of stock at \$10,000. Both were partially covered by insurance. Several years ago, a similar fire swept the public square, and a woman was burned to death. No one was injured in the fire Monday. A policeman turned in the alarm when he discovered the blaze at 4:30 o'clock,*

*but the fire had already gained considerable headway. The Florence fire department was asked to help, but its truck broke down on the 10-mile run from Florence to Darlington. The efficient work of the Darlington firemen prevented the spread of the blaze to other buildings. A strong wind was blowing while the fire raged.”*

The **November 3, 1932** printing of The State noted that *“Fire almost completely destroyed the Trinity Methodist church here tonight, causing damages estimated at \$25,000. The adjacent education building was saved, but both the church and Sunday school auditorium were ruined. Only the walls of the church are left standing. The fire is thought to have originated in a defective flue and it spread immediately under the slate roof which made it difficult for firemen to reach the flames.*

The **July 22, 1934** edition of the Florence Morning News reported that *“The Darlington Fire Department on Cashua street is undergoing at this time complete remodeling. The walls of the building have been calcimined and refinished and a partition has been erected fifty feet from the entrance of the building for the two trucks. Frank Drake is the chief of the Darlington fire department.”*

The **October 7, 1934** printing of the Florence Morning News reported that *“Fire starting in the Kuker building in the business section of Florence caused damage of \$50,000. The local fire department, aided by the fire department of Darlington, confined the flames to the second floor. Woolworth’s and Zeigler’s Drug Store on the ground floor suffered the loss of their stock from water damage. Smith’s dancing studio and Hodges music studio and the Dennis Tailoring company on the second floor suffered a total loss with no insurance. While the fire was in progress, employees of the Colonial Theater located in the City Hall discovered a burning trash box on the stage. A 16-year-old boy who had ridden a circus train into town*

*was held for questioning. The Florence fire department assisted by Chief Frank Clark and seven men from the Darlington fire department fought the blaze until 11 o'clock before it was brought under control. The Darlington firemen led by Chief Frank Clark deserve praise. Buster Smoot showed superiority as a 'fire eater.'"*

On page 8 of the Florence Morning News, dated **February 6, 1935**, under the section called SEEN ABOUT TOWN, is a brief account stating, *"Firemen answering a call to 300 West Darlington after the occupant of the house had left some clothes too near a red hot stove."*

*"Too Enter Team Firemen's Races At Bennettsville,"* read the caption of the **June 16, 1935** edition of the Florence Morning News. *"Plans are being made by the Darlington fire department to participate in the State Firemen's convention to be held on Monday and Tuesday in Bennettsville. On Tuesday racing will be enjoyed consisting of motor races, hand reel races, truck racing. A parade will take place sometime during the day and the equipment from the fire departments of the towns represented at the convention will take place. The Darlington fire department has be practicing for the convention for the past two months."*

In an article published in the **September 30, 1936** printing of the Florence Morning News, it is reported that *"Fire which threatened for sometime to do a heavy damage broke out early this afternoon in the home of W. M. Keith on Main street here and destroyed the Keith home and the Silver Slipper lodge, located next door. When firemen arrived upon the scene the roof of the home was in blazes and the fire quickly spread to the Silver Slipper building destroying completely both buildings. Only the quick work of the Darlington Fire Department averted several houses from catching on fire in the section of Darlington. One of the largest crowds ever to assemble for*



*a local fire were soon on hand to watch the flames and a loss of more than \$1,500 was realized. The damages are covered by insurance.”*

The State newspaper noted on **January 6, 1937** that *“One of the worst fires in recent years in Darlington started here early tonight and completely destroyed plant No. 1 of the Darlington Veneer company. Flames originated in the dry kiln and had spread so quickly when firemen arrived upon the scene that it was impossible to save the plant. Due to the quick work of the Darlington fire department other buildings owned and operated by the veneer company were saved.”*

The Florence Morning News of **February 9, 1938** printed *“A loss of several thousand dollars was sustained last night when fire broke out in the A. Hyman warehouse on Columbian street and the building was completely destroyed. The origin of the fire is undetermined and only the quick work of the Darlington fire department prevented more nearby buildings from catching on fire. Destroyed in the building were several hundred bushels of peas, corn, and other feedstuffs. A cow was also burned to death in the flames. A lot of hay was burned.”*

*“Darlington Is Firemen’s Host,”* read the caption in the **June 24, 1940** edition of The State. *“Firemen from all over the state began arriving in Darlington this afternoon for the 34<sup>th</sup> annual convention of South Carolina state firemen, which convenes here Monday and Tuesday of this week. Several hundred of the firemen are expected to attend the two-day program.”*

The State newspaper reported in their **May 20, 1941** publication that *Damage estimated at more than \$60,000 was sustained last night when the Coxe Brothers Lumber Company in Montclare section of*

*Darlington County was practically destroyed. The fire was discovered by the night watchman, and the Darlington fire department was immediately called to the scene. However, the flames had gained such headway that it was impossible to save the plant. The plant was one of the largest in this section of South Carolina, and had a large yearly output. The fire was the most serious to occur in Darlington County in recent years. The fire was easily visible in many sections of the Pee Dee during the early hours of the morning.”*

The **February 12, 1942** printing of The State newspaper noted that *“Members of the Darlington fire department have named Earl B. Wilson, Darlington business man, as captain for the approaching year. He will succeed J. C. Stone, who has been named the assistant chief of the department. Frank Drake is the fire chief.”*

The State newspaper of **May 26, 1942** shared that *“Darlington’s third fire in the past 24 hours broke out here late this afternoon causing a heavy damage when a freight car on the Atlantic Coast Line track, loaded with bales of cotton, was almost completely destroyed. A passerby noticed the blaze, and called the fire department. Firemen attempted to unload the burning bales as quickly as possible. However, smoke and flames had done considerable damage. The origin of the fire is unknown. A railroad engine soon arrived upon the scene and pumped water into a Darlington fire truck, thus assisting in securing more water for the rapidly burning cotton. A nearby house also caught on fire on the roof from sparks, however, only a slight damage was caused here.”*

*“Darlington Fire Chief Sees Own Home Burn,”* was the caption in the **November 25, 1943** printing of The State. *“The Darlington fire chief, Frank Drake who has aided in extinguishing hundreds had to stand by and watch his own home on Grove street burn today. The blaze*

*was the second on the Drake home in recent years. The fire started from sparks from the chimney on the roof. The blaze had rapidly spread when the fire department arrived on the scene. Only the fast work of the local firemen prevented the entire building from being destroyed.”*

The State newspaper noted in their **July 28, 1945** edition of the paper that *“Darlington’s most disastrous fire in recent years occurred shortly before noon here today when flames virtually destroyed the planing mill of the Daniel Lumber company. A loss of between \$40,000 and \$50,000 has been estimated. The blaze, which began from a switch in a newly installed electric motor in the mill, quickly enveloped the entire planing mill. By the time the two Darlington fire trucks had arrived on the scene, it was impossible to save the building. Smoke from the big fire quickly spread throughout the city and drew hundreds of spectators to the scene.”*

Florence Morning News, printed on **December 25, 1945**, made an appeal to Darlington’s citizens. *“The Darlington Fire Department requests that persons turning in alarms at fire boxes please remain at the boxes until the trucks arrive, in order that the exact location of future fires may be more easily and quickly determined here.”*

On **October 10, 1946**, an article appeared in The Florence Morning News which said, *“Bill Stokes, Darlington fire truck driver, thinks that the hospital jinx has struck his family. Sometime ago his son, Harry, was carried to the McLeod Infirmary in Florence for an operation. Later his wife was operated on in a Columbia hospital. On Monday of this week a young son, Willie, was sent home from school suffering with an acute attack of appendicitis. He was rushed to a Florence hospital for an operation.”*

The **January 15, 1948** edition of the Florence Morning News reported that committees were appointed by the Darlington city council: *“Named as trustees of the Darlington firemen’s fund for the coming year are Mayor Cecil E. Harper, Tom Buchanan and Frank Drake, who is the fire chief.”*

On **July 7, 1948**, The State newspaper reported that *“A fire which threatened destruction to several nearby buildings broke out last night in the house of Louise Henderson on Coker street, destroying this building and all of its contents. A house standing next door, owned and operated by Florida Dinking also caught fire and was almost a total loss. Only the quick work of the Darlington Fire Department prevented further destruction on the street. A two-year-old child was asleep in the Henderson home when the fire was discovered and was quickly removed.”*

The Darlington Fire Department was requested to help the City of Florence Fire Department fight a fire in the three-story Rainwater Furniture store which threatened a number of other buildings on the 100 block of North Dargan street before it could be brought under control. According to the **December 7, 1948** printing of The Florence Morning News, *“Firemen were hampered by the heavy glass-and-mesh windows of the store and the lack of aerial ladder equipment. City policemen cracked out the windows with rifle, carbine and shotgun fire. Florence Fire Chief McKain said the Darlington Fire Department was the only out-of-town department from which he asked for help.”*

The **January 31, 1949** printing of The State newspaper reported that *“The Wish Bone eating establishment located on the Darlington-Hartsville highway was completely destroyed by fire last night. The flames, said to have broken out in the kitchen, soon enveloped the entire structure. The Darlington fire department was called to the*

*scene, however, there was insufficient water to put out the fire as the business was located about seven miles from Darlington. The firemen kept several nearby out buildings from being engulfed in flames.”*

According to The State newspaper of **September 9, 1949**, *“Plans have been made in Darlington by the city council for the installation of five additional fire alarm boxes, which will be placed in all sections of this city.”*

The State reported on **September 10, 1949** that *“Damages of \$1,000 were inflicted on a Darlington restaurant which caught fire here today on South Main street. The origin of the flames is said to have been from defective wiring in the hot water heater. The Darlington Fire department extinguished the flames before any nearby buildings were damaged but the interior of the eating place was badly damaged by the flames.”*

Again, The State paper reported on **December 14, 1949** that *“The Darlington fire department will hold its annual turkey banquet Friday night. Frank Drake, fire department chief for many years, will be the official host.”*

*“Darlington Firemen Save 2 Rural Buildings,”* according to an article which appeared in the **August 6, 1951** edition of The State. *“The Darlington fire department made two hasty calls this morning to the rural sections of Darlington County, and saved two burning buildings. The firemen were called to the home of Ed Bacote at Palmetto, on the Florence highway, when flames ignited the roof of the large two-story building; their quick work saved the residence. The trucks were also called to the tobacco-filled barn of Newton Howle near the city.”*

According to the Florence Morning News, dated **June 29, 1952**, the Darlington Fire Department responded to a call for assistance from their neighboring Hartsville Fire Department. *“Smoke still dimmed the downtown business section late today as the four buildings wrecked in this morning’s all-alarm fire hissed and smoldered. The fire, listed as the city’s biggest fire loss in many years, gutted four business establishments and early estimates place damage in excess of \$150,000. Fire Chief John F. Auten said Hartsville and Darlington firefighters fought the blaze for five hours.*

The State newspaper noted on **October 11, 1952** that *“Darlington firemen turned the hose on the automobile they were sitting in last night. Assistant Fire Chief Earl Wilson and Fire Truck Driver Bill Stokes of Darlington were sitting in the town police automobile in front of the fire department when the vehicle caught afire. The firemen quickly put out the blaze. A cigarette thrown in the foot of the car is believed to have caused the fire.”*

*“Darlington Firemen Elect New Officers,”* according to an article in The State paper on **January 13, 1953**. *“The Darlington Fire Department has elected the following officers for the coming year: Assistant chief, Leon Beckham; captain, Earl B. Wilson, Sr.; secretary Cliff T. Brown, and treasurer, J. E. Garland. Four new men were added to the staff of the local fire department: D. C. Farrell, John J. Ward, Charles Green, and J. D. Lane.”*

The **June 8, 1953** edition of The State newspaper reported that *“Despite heavy rains at the time of the services in the church, a large number of relatives and friends of Earl B. Wilson, 63, gathered here for his final rites. As the procession made its way from the church to the cemetery, the hearse was preceded by a Darlington Fire Truck in memory of Mr. Wilson’s long and faithful duty as a captain in the*

*city's volunteer fire-fighting force. Mr. Wilson, who died Friday afternoon from burns, was popular with a wide circle of friends."* A follow-up article stated that Mr. Wilson died *"from third degree burns when a blow torch pot exploded while he was working on his boat."*

*"Fire broke out in the home of Louise Roger, school teacher, on West Broad Street this morning, and for several minutes threatened nearby buildings,"* according to The State of **November 28, 1953**. *In a thickly populated residential area, the flames broke out in the upper part of the house from defective wiring, and soon enveloped the building. The quick work of the Darlington Fire Department caused nearby buildings to escape the rapidly burning flames."*

*"Darlington Fire Station Building Being Renovated,"* noted The Florence Morning News of **December 10, 1953**. *"Considerable renovation work is being done to the Darlington Fire Department building on Cashua street. The project will be completed late this month."*

The Columbia Record of **February 11, 1954** reported that *"Firemen of the city responded to 107 alarms during 1953, according to a report of the local department, made by Cliff Brown, its secretary."*

*"Blaze Brings Double Trouble in Darlington,"* read the caption in the **November 13, 1954** printing of The State paper. *"A Darlington woman had double trouble today when fire destroyed her home. Fanny Simons told Darlington firemen that \$500 in cash which she had in a pocket book resting on an oil stove, also burned in the blaze. She said the stove had not been lit. Homes on either side of the Simons house were damaged by the fire before it was halted by firemen."*

The State reported on **December 9, 1956** that *“Darlington city council has voted to place the members of the Darlington police department and local firemen under Social Security coverage, retroactive to Jan. 1, 1956.”*

The **November 20, 1958** edition of the Florence Morning News noted that *“Volunteer firemen and members of the Rescue Squad in Darlington are attending a firemen’s school this week at the local fire department. H. B. Wells, of the State Firemen’s Assoc., is the instructor.”*

The State paper printed on **September 7, 1959** a story about *“Quick work on the part of Darlington firemen averted a more serious blaze in the News and Press Printing shop here this week. Cliff Brown, secretary of the fire department, detected smoke late at night and called the volunteer department. Damage was confined mostly to an air conditioner, where it was believed the blaze originated.”*

On **November 21, 1959**, The Florence Morning News reported that *“Plans are being made for installation of five new fire alarm boxes in Darlington. Boxes have been installed at Cain School and Mayo School, and there will be one put in on Greenway Drive, a recently annexed part of Darlington. A fire alarm box will also be installed at the corner of Lucas and Buchanan streets. Completion of the installation of the boxes will be done by the first of next year.”*

The Citizen’s Bank Building in Darlington was damaged by fire as reported in the Florence Morning News on **March 4, 1960**. *“Fire damages estimated at several thousand dollars resulted from fire in the Citizen’s Bank Building on the Public Square here Wednesday night. Officials said the fire started in the rear of the first floor of the three-story building. It apparently was caused by defective wiring. Smoke and water damage was also reported to offices on the*



*second floor of the bank building. The studio of Giles Salvo, a member of the St. John's School faculty, was virtually a total loss. The Darlington Fire Dept. battled the blaze for several hours after the fire was discovered about 9 p.m."*

The Orangeburg paper, The Times and Democrat, printed on **July 7, 1960**, "*A bolt of lightning started a fire that destroyed a rural home near here Tuesday night. Darlington volunteer firemen said that when they arrived at the home of L. W. Herring, near Early's Cross Roads, the fire had too much headway to control. Mr. and Mrs. Herring and their three children were away from home at the time. Field workers saw the fire and saved some of the furnishings."*

The Florence Morning News provide sad news on **March 16, 1963** for Darlington's citizens. "*Franke William Drake, 61, Darlington Fire Chief, died Friday at his home after an extended illness. He was educated in the Society Hill and Darlington public schools. He moved to Darlington at the age of 9, and operated and owned a repair garage here for the past forty years. He has been fire chief for Darlington for the past 27 years."*

News from The State newspaper on **October 14, 1964** revealed the death of a Darlington fireman. "*A long-time Darlington fireman died of an apparent heart attack here Tuesday just as firemen began battling a stubborn \$35,000 blaze at the city-county health center. The fireman, 56-year-old D. C. Ferrell, had just driven a city fire truck to the blazing health center and had begun operating pumps when he collapsed amidst a bellow of smoke. Ferrell, one of two full-time firemen here, had been with the department 11 years, but had a history of heart trouble. Volunteer Fire Department Chief S. L. Beckham said at least three other firemen—James Tyner, Billy Garland, and J. C. Stone, Jr.—were overcome by smoke from the tar and insulation at the roof of the 15 year-old building. Smoke from the*

*fire, visible 10 miles away in Florence, generally obscured the flames from a horde of onlookers at the one-story brick building, but Chief Beckham said, ‘the whole attic was burning and kept on burning.’”*

The Greenville News noted on **November 23, 1965** that *“A four-year-old boy suffocated Sunday night in a fire that damaged his family’s home. Darlington firemen tried in vain to revive William Charles Stephens, Jr., after breaking a window to reach him. His mother had carried his younger sister out and thought he was following them. By the time she learned he was still in the house, the heat and smoke were too intense for anyone to enter it.”*

The Florence Morning News printed on **April 2, 1966** that *“Rufus Simon heard a roaring sound while he was home for lunch Friday, and a few minutes later, he and his wife and daughter were homeless. The house next door, he said, was ablaze beyond control by the time he knew about it, and his house and three other houses were destroyed in about a half hour. Darlington firemen termed it ‘lucky as hell’ there was no more property damage. Winds whipped briskly past the burning homes across a street where firemen saved a two-story frame house from going up, too.”* Leon Beckham is Fire Chief.

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