

The Partial History of The Camden Fire Department 1779-1923

The history of the Camden Fire Department has its beginnings during a time when fires were a common occurrence in the little, but prospering town. According to Camden archives and The Historic Resources Survey of Camden, we know that the Courthouse and jail were damaged by a fire in 1779; in 1781, much of the town, including the Courthouse and jail, were destroyed by fire as Lord Francis Rawdon and the British troops exited the town on May 9th; in 1798, the first known ordinance regarding fire prevention was enacted and required property owners to have a well, good buckets, and a ladder; a major fire destroyed the central square and nearby buildings of the town on October 3, 1813; and three years later in 1816 the first mention is made of Camden either entertaining the idea of organizing an “Independent Fire Company” or actually having one already formed. However, in the May 5, 1841, edition of The Camden Weekly Journal, is a brief mention of the 13th Anniversary supper of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company at Gifford’s Hall which would place its date of organization actually in 1828. Again, the Camden archives state that a Hook and Ladder Company was organized in 1830, and the Hydraulion Fire Company was formed in 1833.

Be that as it may, this writer will attempt to chronicle some interesting facts about the Camden Fire Department, its early beginnings, struggles, leadership, major challenges, and ultimate progression and progress. As mentioned above, Camden has had its share of destruction by fire. We know on November 23, 1829, a major conflagration destroyed Camden’s commercial district and destroyed more than eighty-five buildings. And, of course, General Sherman’s soldiers burned many structures and businesses when they entered the town on February 24, 1865, and just two months later, General Potter came to town and started more fires on their way north.

On **May 14, 1836**, The Camden Weekly Journal, reported the following: *“At a regular annual meeting of the ‘Camden Independent Fire Company,’ held on Monday evening last, at the Camden Debating Club Room, the following were the officers elected for the present year: A. Burr, Captain; James Dunlap, Lieutenant; William E. Hughson, Sec’ry. And Treasurer; J. S. Depass, 1st Director; John Rosser, 2nd Director; P. F. Villepigue, 3rd Director; John H. Anderson, 4th Director; Axemen: Douglas Minton, Jonathan P. Shiver, Wm. C. Workman, A. G. Willis.”*

Then, The Camden Commercial Courier, printed the following letter on **May 13, 1837**. To The Citizens: *“The Camden Independent Fire Engine Company, having, by experience, found that the Engine under their control failed to answer the purpose for which they were organized, in it being of a construction that rendered it heavy and difficult to work; felt themselves warranted in the appointing of a committee for the purpose of soliciting subscriptions for the purchase of one of a more modern form.*

This committee, in their report at the annual meeting, which occurred on the 8th inst., state, that after an assiduous attention to the duties assigned, they have only been about to obtain the sum of \$454, including a donation of \$50 from the Fire and Marine Insurance Company at Charleston: that they totally failed, in an application made to the town authorities: who, on consideration, deemed it unadvisable to make an appropriation from the town fund, although they were aware that a necessity exists of another Engine being added to the town.

The committee appointed in May last, to ascertain the probable cost of a suitable Engine in N. York, stated, that the whole expense might be put down at \$800—which shows that the company is now deficient in the sum of \$350, to effect the object in view.”

After the reading of the Report the following resolution was submitted and passed.

“RESOLVED, That the Capt. elected, for the succeeding year, be authorized to publish an appeal to the citizens, of the facts, and that the list remain open until the second Monday in June, to which time this meeting will stand adjourned, when, if the deficient amount for the purchase of a new Engine be not subscribed, the company will forthwith be disbanded.

In exposition of the FACTS, I have, in fulfillment of this duty, but a few remarks to make—for I am persuaded it is only necessary to make known the circumstance—as not a citizen who FEELS for the interest of the town will require urging.

The town has at present but two Engines, both of which are hardly deserving of the name—therefore every citizen should not only feel, but exhibit a warmth of interest in an undertaking which will enable an efficient and organized company to contend with the fiery element in an hour of danger. The advantage of good Engines is not a matter of experiment with the community, as unfortunately, demonstrative proof has shewn.

Should success attend the effort, the funds will be collected when the Engine arrives; probably about the 1st of November—those, therefore, who are in favor of the object, will testify it by the NAMES, if opposed by the SILENCE. The list will be found at my place of business. A. Burr,

May 13

Capt. I.F.E. Company”

Again, The Camden Commercial Courier reported on **May 27, 1837**, the following good news: *“With pleasure I acknowledge the receipt of Seventy-Five DOLLARS, from David Alexander, Esq. as a donation from the Union Insurance Company at Charleston, South Carolina, toward the purchase of a new Engine by the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company. A. Burr, Capt. I.F.E.C.”*

The Camden Weekly Journal printed on Wednesday, **October 6, 1841**, the following notice about the death of a brother member of the fire

company. (**This writer wishes to direct the reader to the name listed at the very bottom of the notice: John N. Gamewell, Sec'y. Pro. Tem.**).

“At an extra meeting of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company, convened for the purpose of making arrangements to perform the last sad offices of friendship for a brother member. The following preamble and resolutions handed in by a committee appointed for the purpose, were unanimously adopted.

Whereas, Death has entered our ranks, and deprived us of a brother member, Mr. Charles Davis Kinkead, who has been cut down in the bloom of youth and manhood. This dispensation of an unerring Providence has cast a deep gloom over us. And, whereas, it is our painful privilege on this melancholy occasion to express our regret and mingle our sorrow with his afflicted relatives and friends. Be it therefore,

Resolved: That this company deeply regret this severe dispensation of Divine Providence in the untimely death of our worthy and esteemed Secretary Charles D. Kinkead.

Resolved: That although he has fallen among strangers, yet his unobtrusive manners and his many estimable qualities have gained for him that admiration and respect which is always the reward of the meritorious and good.

Resolved: That we deeply sympathize with the absent relatives and friends of the deceased, and in testimony of our sincere regret, we will attend his funeral as a body and wear the usual badge of mourning thirty days.

Resolved: That the Secretary Pro. Tem. be required to transmit a copy of these resolutions to the afflicted relatives of the deceased.

Resolved: That these proceedings be published in the Camden Journal. J. H. Anderson, Capt., John. N. Gamewell, Sec'y. Pro. Tem.”

The Camden Weekly Journal, in their **May 4, 1842** edition, talks about a “Fire Engine For Sale.” *“THE Camden Independent Fire Engine Company wishing to procure a larger Engine, offer the one they now have, for*

sale. It is a first rate suction Engine, of the most approved construction, with twenty four feet of suction, and about one hundred and fifty feet of ordinary hose. It is nearly new, has been but little used, and is kept in first rate order. For further information address the Secretary of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company."

On **August 10, 1842**, The Camden Weekly Journal printed an announcement about the fire company's upcoming meeting. **(Please note who the Secretary is at this time...Gamewell.)**

"Camden Independent Fire Engine Company..an Extra Business Meeting of the Company will be held This Evening, at 8 o'clock at Davis' Hall. Punctual attendance is expected, as business of importance will be transacted. By order of the Captain. GAMEWELL, Secretary"

In the next addition of the paper, dated **August 24, 1842**, announces the results of the meeting held last. *"At a meeting of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company, held at their Hall on the 10th inst. the following resolution was adopted—*

Resolved, That, for the purpose of affording an opportunity to public spirited citizens of the town (who feel interested in the maintenance of the Company) of contributing to its support, that such citizens may be elected honorary members, on application by letter, to the Secretary, and a vote of two-thirds of the members present at any regular meeting; and that such members shall be entitled to all the privileges of membership, except those of voting, and the legal exemptions, and shall not be liable to perform manual duty, on paying a commutation of five dollars per annum. A correct copy from the minutes: GAMEWELL, Secretary"

The reader at this point may be curious and questioning just who and what is the significance of the Secretary's name. John Nelson Gamewell was born in Camden on Christmas Day in 1822. He died at the age of 74 (1896) and is buried in Hackensack, New Jersey. His

father was a Methodist minister in the area and a missionary. John Gamewell was a brilliant man who served as the postmaster of Camden, the telegraph operator, and helped maintain the printing business of the local paper.

Mr. Gamewell developed a fascination about the telegraph concept and worked on ways to improve the transmission of signals. After attending a seminar on the Channing & Farmer Fire Alarm System, Gamewell purchased all of the patents for this system and devoted his entire business career to its introduction and improvement. However, his business venture was cut short because of the Civil War, and he spent most of those war years in Camden. Unfortunately for Gamewell, the U. S. Government confiscated all of his patents and sold them at public auction (some writers state they were sold on Camden's courthouse steps while others say in Washington, D.C.). After the war, an employee of Gamewell's bought the patents back for only \$80.00 and returned them to him. Soon after the war John Nelson Gamewell reorganized his company under the new name of *"Gamewell Fire Alarm Telegraph Company."*

By the mid-1870s, the Gamewell Fire Alarm box system had been installed in over 250 cities across the nation, and, by the early 1880's over 500 cities had purchased his system. Among those cities in South Carolina were Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, Spartanburg, Sumter, Anderson, Newberry, Greenwood, Orangeburg and, of course, Camden (1904). At one point, Gamewell held 95% of the market share nationwide, and some internationally. Today, Gamewell Fire Alarm Company is part of Honeywell Security & Fire Control Systems.

Not only was Gamewell a local businessman and famous entrepreneur, but he was a member of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company who served for several years as Secretary and a Director. When Mr. Gamewell died, people characterized him as *"an exceedingly*

generous man.” A Hackensack newspaper said of him, he was “always held in high esteem of his neighbors.” A street in the New Jersey town, not far from the fire headquarters’ station, is named “Gamewell Street” in his honor.

So, now the Camden Fire Department can boast with great pleasure of having as one of its past leaders the famous and munificent John Nelson Gamewell.

The Edgefield Advertiser, **February 1, 1843** edition, publicized an article which provides a glimpse of the operation of the town’s fire companies at a potentially dangerous fire. *“About 2 o’clock P.M. on yesterday, our citizens were alarmed by the cry of fire, which was discovered in the elegant mansion of H. R. Cook, Esq. situated on DeKalb street, near the Presbyterian church. The wind being very high at the time, great fears were entertained for its safety. The flames, however, were kept somewhat subdued, by a gentleman of the town, who deserves much praise for his exertions, by throwing wet blankets over them, until the arrival of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company, with the Hydraulion (which they have in charge until the arrival of their new Engine,) when the fire was speedily extinguished. One of the town Engines was promptly on the spot, but being without hose and compelled to take a position where she would have had to work against the wind, it was deemed advisable to throw her supply of water in the Hydraulion, whose hose had been carried up a ladder to within a few yards of the fire. We would here suggest to every citizen the propriety of having a ladder on their premises. Those present at the fire yesterday cannot longer doubt their utility. Camden Journal, Jan. 25th ult.”*

Again, the name of John N. Gamewell is witnessed in a notice from The Camden Weekly Journal, dated **May 10, 1848**. *“At the annual meeting of this Company held on Monday evening last, the following gentlemen*

were elected officers for the ensuing year---S. E. Capers, Captain; W. M. Watson, Lieutenant; D. S. Sargeant, Secretary; W. T. Birchmore, Treasurer; F. Root, T. Wilson, John N. Gamewell and A. E. Allen, Directors."

Then on **July 26th** of the same year, The Camden Weekly Journal wrote this: *"The person who has written Constitution of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company in his possession, will please return it to the Treasurer of the Company."*

On **February 22, 1850**, The Weekly Journal posted a new Ordinance passed by the town which gave some added benefits to the faithful volunteer firemen. *"To exempt certain members of the Camden Fire Engine Company from Patrol Tax.*

Whereas, it is deemed essential to the interests and safety of the people of Camden, that a well-organized Fire Company of white men should be kept up therein: and to promote that object by all the means in their power. The Town Council do hereby ordain—

That hereafter, in addition to the exemption from ordinary militia duty and road work, as at present, every member of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company who shall satisfy the Town Recorder during the month of January, that he has performed duty faithfully as a fireman for the last twelve months, and who then declares it as his intention to continue a member of said company, shall be exempt from the annual tax of two dollars and fifty cents, known as the Patrol Tax. The exemption to continue while he remains a member of the Company, and no longer.

Ratified in Town Council assembled, this the 6th day of February, in the year of our Lord on thousand eight hundred and fifty. Witness the Seal of Council, and the hand of the Intendant. James R. McKain, Intendant of the Town of Camden, L. W. Ballard, Town Recorder."

The Weekly Journal in their **March 21, 1850** newspaper talks about a “defaulters list” which was a term first coined by Benjamin Franklin in 1736 which refers to a disciplinary roster maintained by the Union Fire Company of Philadelphia identifying firemen who had not participated in fire company activities, ie. responding to fires, meetings, drills, member funerals, parades, etc. Each violator was fined a certain amount of money for each infraction. Camden was no different. The announcement reads, *“The Regular Exercise Meeting of the Camden Independent Fire Engine Company, will take place on the first Monday in April next. Members are requested to be punctual in their attendance, equipped as directed by the resolution adopted at the last business meeting. The By-laws will be rigidly enforced against all defaulters. By orders of the Captain, H. C. Wellhausen, Sec’y.”*

On the subject of “Defaulters’ List,” according to Camden Fire Chief John Bowers, research reveals that back in the day *“all members had to pay annual dues in the amount of \$1.00 to the fire company. Members had to furnish their own protective equipment. If a member broke a rule or regulation they would be fined according to how severe the offense up to removal. Members that missed meetings, fires or drills were fined \$2.00. If you missed 3 meetings or drills in a row without excuse you were dismissed. This was in effect until the 1970’s.”*

Once again, from the Camden Weekly Journal dated, **April 12, 1850**, appears a very articulate acclamation for the Fire Engine Company written by their leader. *“We are pleased to see this old and valuable Company is again reviving. The efficient service rendered in by-gone days by this Company, entitles it to our warmest thanks and kindest consideration. The task of the Fireman is not an easy one. Often risking life and limb to rescue or save his neighbor’s property from destruction, he shows as much true magnanimity and patriotism, as he would to meet the enemy of his country upon the battlefield. The claims of the Fireman are not always sufficiently appreciated. Some persons regard*

the service as a mere evasion of law, and exemption from militia and patrol duty. It is not so: the Fireman earns his commutation. A single night of labor may cost him more than fifty exemptions from the tax imposed, could repay him. We are thankful that the services of our Fire Company have not been required for a length of time past and hope they may not be required to exhibit their efficiency for time to come. James F. Sutherland, Esq., is the Captain of the Company.”

The Editor of the Journal announces the retirement of John N. Gamewell as Postmaster and as co-operator of the Camden Weekly Journal in the **January 2, 1855** edition of that newspaper. It was this year that Mr. Gamewell purchased the patents from the Channing & Farmer Fire Alarm Company and launched his career perfecting fire alarm signaling systems.

The article reads, “Mr. Thomas W. Pegues has been appointed Postmaster at Camden, in the place of Mr. John N. Gamewell, resigned. We part with great regret with Mr. Gamewell, and we are sure the entire community agree with us in this expression. A better Postmaster cannot be found anywhere; his equal is not often seen. This involves another change which is a source of regret to us. We are obliged to give up our right hand and kind co-operator, who, for so many years has conducted the mechanical department of the paper; his place we do not expect to supply, but, of course, will do all we can to remedy the change. The entire duties of managing the mechanical department of the office, as well as its editorial interests will devolve upon the Editor; how we shall succeed, remains to be seen.”

On **January 21, 1857**, The Charleston Daily Courier reported “that the charter of the ‘Camden Fire Engine Company’ be and the same is hereby renewed for the term of fourteen years from and after the expiration of its present charter: Provided, The members of the said Company be subject to such regulations as may be made by the Town Council of

Camden for the government of the Company. The members of the said Company, not exceeding forty-five in number, shall be, and they are hereby declared exempt from ordinary militia duty, but shall be liable to perform duty in time of alarm, insurrection or invasion, and shall not be exempt from draft for actual service."

This writer found a posting of a mailed stamped envelope dated **October 11, 1861** having the imprint of the return address of "*Fire Alarm and Police Telegraph*" of Charleston, S. C. in the right-hand corner. Interestingly, the Fire Alarm and Police Telegraph system was installed in Charleston by John Nelson Gamewell, a Camden S. C. postmaster and telegraph operator who purchased rights to the system in 1855. The first city to use a telegraph system to transmit fire and police alarms was Boston in 1852, followed by Philadelphia in 1855, and St. Louis, Baltimore and New Orleans between 1858 and 1860. The city of Charleston started discussions about using Gamewell's system as early as 1855, but apparently decided against it. The posting noted "*in August 1860 the Charleston Courier reported that Gamewell was visiting the city again to demonstrate his product. On September 4 the city council reviewed a detailed proposal from Gamewell, specifying the locations of the telegraph alarms, and shortly thereafter the city entered into a contract with him. The April 3, 1861, Charleston Courier reported that the system was operational.*"

The commentary continued, "*exactly two months after this cover (envelope and letter) was mailed to Camden, S. C., a fire broke out at a window blind and sash factory located on East Bay and Hasell Streets. The fire quickly spread southwest and destroyed about 15% of the city before it was finally extinguished. Some sources say that efforts to control the fire were impeded by the fact that so many firemen had left to fight in the Confederate Army. Robert E. Lee was in Charleston that night and observed the conflagration from the balcony of the Mills House before its proximity forced him to leave.*"

Another interesting fact uncovered in this research is that on the night of the conflagration when General Lee was forced from the hotel, the New York Zouaves (volunteer firemen from New York) were held captive in Charleston's city jail after being captured at the first Battle of Bull Run. They were hurriedly released and under guard sent to Castle Pinckney in the harbor for safe keeping. The story of the New York Zouaves can be found in this writer's book entitled "*A Legacy That Lives On.*"

The Charleston Daily News reported on a fire in Camden published on **June 7, 1866**. It reads "*The Journal brings us the following sad intelligence of a destructive fire in Camden: The residence of Mr. Leslie McCandless, on Broad street, with the smaller Academy on the same lot, and the kitchen of Mrs. S. E. Lee, on the adjoining lot, were all consumed by fire on Sunday morning last. The fire, which was doubtless the result of accident, was discovered about day-break, and before our people could be gathered, had progressed too far to save those buildings. The large Academy on one side, and Mrs. Lee's residence on the other, were rescued by the powerful and untiring efforts of citizens and freedmen. We are unwilling to let the occasion pass without giving our evidence of the praiseworthy conduct of the freedmen in the instance, as well as in others that have come under our observation. They worked most diligently, efficiently and cheerfully.*"

A card of thanks was printed in the Camden Weekly Journal on **January 25, 1867**, in which "*Mr. Fneolich returns thanks to the citizens of Camden and the fire department for their successful efforts for the preservation of his residence from the fire of Wednesday night.*"

On **January 28, 1867**, The Charleston Mercury told of a fire that "*took place on Wednesday evening in the warehouse of Mr. Mendall Smith, in the rear of his store on Broad street. It occurred in a group of wooden*

buildings, in the most likely place to destroy the business portion of the town, and for some time the stores of Messrs. "Freolich, Christiansen, Kirkley, Smith, Goss and others were in danger. Fortunately, the fire department was soon in the field, in vigorous and successful operation, and the flames were arrested by their efforts and by tearing down adjacent buildings. An attempt had been made to fire a building on the adjoining lot, early in the day, which was discovered before it had made progress. The fire was certainly the work of an incendiary."

The Charleston Daily Courier described another fire in Camden in the **June 7, 1867** edition of the paper. *"We regret exceedingly to learn from The Columbia Phoenix of the destruction by fire, on Wednesday evening last, of the Episcopal Church in Camden. The fire was communicated from the chimney of a kitchen on the adjoining lot, which is that occupied by Mr. Robinson's hotel. The fire was confined to the destruction of the Church, although some of the contiguous buildings, stores, etc. were several times in danger."*

On **December 19, 1868**, The Charleston Daily News reported *"The following acts were ratified: An act to facilitate the drawing of jurors in the State; and act to authorize R. S. & M. R. Bennett to collect wharfage; an act renewing the charter of the Camden Fire Engine Company."*

A lengthy description of the activities of the fire companies of Camden are noted in the Camden Weekly Journal dated **May 20, 1869**. *"On Tuesday, the 11th inst., the fire departments of Camden were out in full force, and made a very fine appearance. There may be, and no doubt are, other places that have a much larger fire department than ours, but we venture the assertion, that there is no other place of it size in the State, that can boast of as strong and well organized a fire department as Camden. But, to the parade."*

The article continues, *“At 3:00 o’clock, the different companies handsomely uniformed, with their engines tastefully decorated with flowers, assembled in front of the market, a procession was formed in the following order: Camden Independent Fire Engine Company, Capt. Deas’ Company, Capt. Jenkins’ Company, Capt. Marks’ Company.*

The old Independent, of course, did not expect the other companies to compete with her—she is one of the finest hand engines in the State, and a better company of firemen cannot be mustered in any place, not accepting Charleston or Columbia.

The three colored companies performed to the satisfaction and delight of everyone. The greatest enthusiasm, and a commendable spirit of rivalry pervaded the whole exhibition. We have never known an afternoon, crowded as the streets were, pass off more pleasantly. The distance thrown by each engine is as follows:

<i>No. 1</i>	<i>105 feet</i>
<i>No. 2</i>	<i>124 feet</i>
<i>Hydraulion.</i>	<i>139 feet</i>
<i>Independent</i>	<i>211 feet</i>

We defy any town in the State to show a more efficient and well manned colored fire department than Camden. They are all first rate companies, and it would be difficult to say which was best. All dispersed quietly after the exhibition of water throwing was over.”

The Charleston Daily News reported on **January 27, 1870**, of a *“Bill to incorporate the Camden Hook and Ladder Company.”* And, another notice was printed *“to incorporate The Wateree Fire Engine Company No. 2 of Camden.”* Then, the Daily Phoenix (Columbia) noted on **April 12, 1870**, *“an act to incorporate the DeKalb Fire Engine Company, of the Town of Camden.”*

Thursday, **January 26, 1871**, The Camden Journal announced *“The Camden Independent Fire Engine Company will give an entertainment at the Town Hall, next Wednesday, the first of February, the proceeds of*

which will be applied to the purchase of a new Fire Engine. Admission Fifty cents. Doors open at 7 ½ o'clock."

A very lengthy article appeared in the Camden Journal on **May 16, 1872**, describing in great detail the annual parade of the fire department. *"The Order of Procession—Fine Display—On Monday last, the Fire Department had their annual celebration and parade. For some time past, preparations have been silently but surely going on, looking towards this termination. Engines had been repaired, re-painted, brasses burnished, uniforms looked after, and every thing made ready for the parade. All Monday forenoon was employed in giving the last touch to the Engines, and in decorating them with flowers, which the female friends of the firemen did with their accustomed taste in such matters.*

At three o'clock, pursuant to the notice published in the JOURNAL last week, the signal of formation was given, and the firemen brought up their machines to a position in front of Market Hall, whence the procession was to start. Marshal John R. Goodale formed the procession in the following order:

Music

Warden, Fire Masters, Marshal and Recorder

Camden Independent Fire Engine

Hose Reel

Hydraulic Engine—Capt. David Jenkins

Engine No. 2—Capt. Abram Marks

Engine No. 1—Capt. Wm. Deas

The firemen then manned their Engines and the procession moved up Main Street to Monument Square, thence down to the Court House, and then the different companies moved their machines to the fire wells along the street, filled their boxes and re-assembled at the starting point opposite the Market, where they played off in the following order:

Capt. Jenkins' Engine

Capt. Marks' Engine

*Capt. Deas' Engine
Camden Independent*

The distance attained was as follows: Capt. Marks, 142 feet, Capt. Jenkins, 132 feet, Capt. Deas, 136 feet, Independent (through 50 feet of hose), 200 feet. So that of the smaller Engines, Captain Marks' was pronounced the winner. The measurements were made by Marshal Goodale. The Captains then assumed command of their companies, and the parade was dismissed.

At the business meeting, the following officers were elected to serve for one year: Captain, W. M. Billings, Lieutenant, T. J. Smyrl, Directors, A. M. Hyams, J. T. Nettles, T. E. Birchmore, W. C. Pegues, Treasurer, John Smyrl, Secretary, J. R. Goodale.

At ten o'clock, P. M., the Independents had an elegant supper at Town Hall, to which as was customary, the Municipal officers were invited. The toasts, songs and stories were well given, and the festivities prolonged to quite a late hour. Good fellowship abounded and an exceedingly pleasant evening was spent."

The article continued, "For such a small town as Camden, the fire department is quite efficient and could be made much more so by a judicious system of management. At all fires the different companies are very prompt in their attendance, and generally work with great unanimity of purpose. Nothing gives the citizens of any town a feeling of security such as an efficient fire department and a vigilant police force, in both of which we at present rejoice."

No accident to mar the pleasure of the parade of 1872, and the entire affair was so well managed as to elicit the favorable comment of many who had collected to witness the turn-out. The sun poured down its rays at "summer heat," and many were the exclamations made as to its powers of making the skin set in a healthy manner.

Altogether, the annual parade will be remembered as a pleasant incident in the history of the Fire Department, and we take occasion to congratulate our firemen on the fine appearance of themselves and their machines. The thanks of the Committee of Arrangements are

hereby tendered to the ladies who assisted in the floral decoration of the Independents."

The Camden Journal reported on **June 6, 1872** that *"We notice there is an effort being made by some of our young men, to raise a Hook and Ladder Company. We wish them success as such an organization would be a very desirable acquisition to our fire department."*

August 15, 1872 was an exciting day when the Camden Journal reported that *"The New Truck"* is on the way. *"We are glad to learn that the Phoenix Hook and Ladder Company, recently organized here, have perfected arrangements with the Phoenix of Columbia for the purchase of their truck and that it will arrive here in a short time. We would suggest that when the truck does arrive the whole fire department of Camden turn out and escort the new company and its new apparatus from the depot into town. Music to be furnished by the Wateree Cornet Band."*

A fireman was injured, according to The Camden Journal, in their **December 25, 1872** edition: *"Mr. A. C. Douglas while practicing with The Phoenix Hook and Ladder Company last week, had his hand severely hurt, but no bones broken. He is rapidly recovering."*

More incorporations for the fire department, as noted in The Camden Journal's **January 23, 1873** edition. *"The bill to incorporate the Phoenix Hook and Ladder Company, No. 1, of Camden, was read a second time on Friday last. It is not probable that the bill will meet much resistance, and in short time the members of the Company will find themselves invested with all the corporation rights and privileges which usually appertain to such bodies."*

An article appeared in the Camden Weekly Journal, on **April 11, 1873**, saying *"As we go to press we have to notice the accidental burning of*

the old Martin House on Fair Street, occupied by O. V. Metz. The loss of the building was partially covered by insurance. The Ciples House was on fire several times but was saved by the efficient exertions of the Hook and Ladder Company.”

It seems The Camden Journal’s **January 2, 1873** publication is filled with tragedies. First, *“Two house burned on Saturday last, the dwelling house of M. C. Welsh, on Western Wateree, was destroyed by fire. Nothing was saved. The fire was supposed to have been accidental.”*

Then, *“On Friday, a negro cabin on Mr. I. W. Lang’s place, was partially destroyed by fire, so much so that the inhabitants were compelled to move out of it to other quarters.”*

And, the most troubling article makes reference to *“Another Human Holocaust—Three Unfortunates Burned To Death”*—*“On Monday night at Boykin’s plantation, a colored man and two of his children, age 5 and 7 respectively, were burned to death. The house caught on fire and while the man was endeavoring to rescue the children who were up in the loft, the fire became so severe that they were unable to make their escape and perished in the flames.”*

In the same edition, is a reference to road conditions in the town. This brief account should bring to light how difficult it was back in the day to hand draw the fire apparatus to alarms of fire. *“Mud—a small boy in attempting to cross main street on yesterday, came very near sinking out of sight, so deep was the mud.”*

The Camden Journal on **July 10, 1873**, announces some exciting news. *“ORDERED, that the Recorder advertise in the Camden Journal for proposals to build a house for the Hook and Ladder Company. The dimensions to be handed in by the next meeting of Council, Monday, the 14th, instant. J. K. Witherspoon, Recorder”.*

"FIRE" is reported on **January 15, 1874** by The Camden Journal.

"Shortly after 12 o'clock on Saturday night last, when it was supposed that nearly every one, having finished the labors of the week, had retired to rest, we were aroused by the violent ringing of the fire alarm bell, and upon going out soon found that a fire had been discovered by a policeman to be in the drug store of Messrs. Hodgson & Dunlap, in the very heart of the business center of the town. An incendiary, seeking to destroy that portion of Camden, could with difficulty have found a point more favorably for the execution of his design."

And, then, on **September 3, 1874**, The Charleston Daily News made an announcement for *"The Annual meeting of the Phoenix Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 will be held at their Truck House on this (Thursday) evening, September 3rd. By order of the Foreman. W. R. McCreight, Sec'y."*

The Watchman and Southron paper announced on **December 25, 1883**, that *"the steam fire engine recently ordered by Council has arrived, and was tested on last Monday. Through fifty feet of hose it threw a one-inch stream of water about 170 feet. Through 600 feet of hose it threw water 134 feet. Through two sections of hose of 300 feet each it threw two streams at one time, each stream reaching about 130 feet. We understand that the tests were satisfactory, and that the engine will be kept. A competent engineer has been secured for running it and keeping it in repair."*

The Sanborn Maps of South Carolina dated, **October 1884**, reveal the town's water supply was restricted to a number of public wells located throughout the town on both public and private properties as well as two large fire cisterns located in the business district.

The Camden Archives reveal that the town was finally incorporated in **1888**, and all during the 19th Century, fire protection was provided by several volunteer fire companies.

We read from the Camden Journal, dated **May 22, 1890**, a notice of yet another parade to be held in a few weeks. *“The REGULAR ANNUAL PARADE OF the Camden Fire Department will be held on Monday afternoon, June 2nd, at 6 o’clock. The Firemen will rendezvous on DeKalb Street, East of Broad Street, and be ready to move promptly at 6 o’clock, passing down Broad Street, and will be reviewed by the Intendant and Wardens as they pass the Opera House. They will move in the following order: Hook and Ladder Co., Steam Fire Engine, Vigilant Fire Engine, and Hydraulic Engine. By order of J. J. Goodale, Chief of Department.”*

Again, from the Camden Archives, we found where the town, as a response to the threat of fire, created fire limits in **1891 (this contradicts the Sanborn Map of 1912 which says there were no fire limits)**. *“No structures with wooden walls or roofs could be built within the limits, which included 150 feet on either side of Broad Street from a point just north of York Street to Dekalb Street. With more masonry construction in the business district and an improved fire department, Camden experienced fewer serious fires after the turn of the Century.”*

From Sumter’s paper, The Watchman and Southron, dated **June 19, 1901**, we find *“A Challenge to Camden.”* It reads, *“Delgar Reel Squad has written to the Camden Hose Wagon team for the purpose of arranging a hose wagon race in Camden between the two teams on July 4th. It is not proposed to race for a purse, and the only consideration is to be glory. The Delgars believe they can lower the records made by Camden in Newberry and the offer to meet the Camden champions on their own ground and attempt to beat them in a fair race and made better time than ever made in the South before. It is to be hope that the*

Camden team will accept the challenge of the Delgars and at no expense to themselves secure for Camden a race on the 4th of July between the two fastest hose wagon teams in the South. If the race is arranged a large crowd will go up with the Delgars and help the Camden folks celebrate the 4th in proper style."

The Sanborn Maps of South Carolina, Dated **April 1923**, shows Camden had a population of about 5,000 individuals. The fire department consisted of a Chief and 14 volunteers with one paid driver. The Seagrave triple combination "motor truck" had already been delivered. It was built with a 750 gpm pump, a 40 gallon chemical tank, ground ladders, and 1,000 ft. of 2 ½ " hose. The narrative found on the maps indicate the town also had a Ford motor truck with only 350 ft. of hose. A Gamewell Fire Alarm system had been installed with 14 alarm boxes throughout the town. The water system constructed back in 1897 and remodeled in 1903, now had 83 double hydrants along 13 miles of water pipe.

Camden's history and its fire department's heritage abounds with treasured memories that shall forever be etched in the annals of time. But, probably among the most memorable and even haunting events was the fire on **May 17, 1923**, which destroyed the Cleveland School, about 4 miles from town, and killed 77 youngsters and adults. As a result of this fire and the large loss of life, public outcry at that time focused attention on the issues of fire safety in places of assembly and pressured our elected officials to enact legislation which began to shape building construction and fire codes not only in South Carolina but throughout the nation.

This writer chooses to suspend further research of the Camden Fire Department at this point because more current history is already chronicled from 1923 forward. It has been an interesting project to uncover some of this fire department's stories and legacy which had

possibly been lost through time or forgotten by generations long past. Hopefully this work will be shared with many whose interest and love of the fire service will kindle a desire to keep our legacy alive.

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