

Early History Of The Easley Fire Department

**“The First 75 Years”
1874-1949**

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The history of the Village of Easley goes back to the mid-1800s when a community of pioneers settled in the southeastern section of Pickens County at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Those who came to inhabit the area were attracted by farming and timber opportunities. As time moved on, a few entrepreneurs and visionaries, led by Col. Robert Holcombe and William Easley, worked to bring a railroad to the area in order to advance the ever-expanding timber business. The first residence was built, a train depot, and Post Office became a reality which inspired others to construct more commercial and residential properties.

The Town of Easley was chartered in 1873 which afforded even more opportunities for investments and growth. People were attracted to the area also because of the many beautiful waterfalls, hiking trails and lakes found in the area.

Although little is known about the town prior to its being chartered, we do know, based on the experiences of other communities of that era, that the calamity of fire was a common occurrence. Practically all structures were built of wood; the absence of building codes allowed homes and businesses to be built close together; poorly fabricated chimneys were the cause of many a blaze; often candles were carelessly placed and maintained. Additionally, grass, brush and woods fires were frequent causes of alarm for property owners as they cleared their lands.

In 1873, the Town of Easley had no organized fire protection, however, compelling evidence supports the likelihood the town did depend on "citizen volunteers" to man bucket brigades and to serve as salvage crew whose job was to remove the contents of a burning structure before all was lost. The author, Nancy Backes, in the book *Great Fires*

of America, said *“America had for many years helplessly watched their little wooden towns burn and be rebuilt and burn again.”* Prior to the organization of a fire department, it has been said that fire was the *“greatest enemy”* for a community.

One of the earliest mentions of a sad incident involving a fire of sorts is recorded in The Pickens Sentinel on **November 2, 1876**. The article says, *“We have received the sad intelligence, that the boiler of an engine, used in ginning cotton at Easley Station, exploded last Monday last, instantly killing Mr. John Brooks, a worthy young man, and seriously scalding another. The top of Mr. Brooks’ head was torn off, and his body blown some distance. We have not learned the cause of the explosion, nor any particulars of the sad accident.”*

As the town began to grow and more people settled the little town, a post office was constructed in **1875** and, it became necessary for a school to be established, so the first school building was erected in **1876**. A train depot and dwellings were constructed to support the town’s expansion due in large part to a family lumber mill that initially was the life blood of the community.

The Pickens Sentinel describes a brief account and the first documented fire loss in their **July 12, 1877** edition. *“The citizens of Easley have made up a very handsome purse for Mr. Glazener, whose house was burned at that place last week. Mr. Glazener is a very worthy, industrious citizen and deserves the aid of his more fortunate neighbors.”*

The **March 23, 1882** edition of The Pickens Sentinel revealed *“The dwelling house of Mr. Ves Aiken of Easley, was recently destroyed by fire, together with nearly all the furniture belonging to the family. The fire is supposed to have been the work of an incendiary.”*

The Easley Messenger reports on a fire which could have been disastrous for the entire community in the **December 14, 1883** printing of the paper. The headline reads, *"Closing of The Easley High School"* and continues with the following narrative. *"The formal closing of this well-established school took place on Wednesday night last, in the presence of a concourse of patrons and visitors. The spacious chapel of the Academy was full to overflowing. Speeches, recitations, music, and play."*

"One serious accident happened. Just before the curtains were drawn aside, Miss Blanche Hudgens, daughter of Capt. A. W. Hudgens, who was to take part in the piece had her dress, which was made of white Swiss, to catch fire. It was burned entirely off. Some of the men near the stage, jumped to her rescue, and after a short time succeeded in putting out the flames by means of an overcoat. She doubtless would have added much pleasure of the evening but was so badly burned at the time that she was carried home at once. We are glad to report her better this morning and hope to see her out soon."

The Easley Messenger printed a story on **January 25, 1884** that shocked the community. *"Mrs. Ruth Braswell, an aged lady, living on Reese Brown's place near Pickens, was so badly burned on the 21st inst., that she died twelve hours after. She and some children had been shelling corn around the fire, and Mrs. Braswell was picking up some grains that had fallen on the hearth, when her dress caught on fire."*

A humorous bit of fire prevention advice was observed in the **March 21, 1884** edition of The Easley Messenger. *"Don't kindle the fire with kerosene unless you are prepared for a land that is fairer than this."*

The Pickens Sentinel reported on a fire in their **October 29, 1891** paper which said, *"The burning of a small outhouse near Squire Gossett's*

residence in Easley last Monday afternoon, caused quite a furry among the citizens. Everybody dreads the cry of fire these dry times."

Again, The Pickens Sentinel tells of a fire in the **May 3, 1894** printing of the paper. *"A barn belonging to Mrs. Elvira Lesley, who lives on the Pickens and Easley Road, was destroyed by fire last Sunday night. There were about 25 bushels of corn and 500 bundles of fodder consumed. There is no explanation, so it must have been set on fire by someone."*

A powerful warning to the citizens of both Pickens and her sister town, Easley, was found in The Pickens Sentinel dated **June 21, 1894**. *"The citizens who live and do business north of Main Street in Pickens from J. P. Carey's office to the foot of the street, should ever bear in mind the great danger they are in from fire. The buildings are all of wood and so close together that a fire once under way, means the total destruction of that side of town. Few wells and some of the few dry, give little chance to an unorganized bucket brigade to do any effective work. We cannot be too careful of fire."*

The **October 29, 1894** Pickens Sentinel reported that *"J. D. Sheppard who lives near Easley lost his house and barn by fire Monday morning with nearly all the contents."*

The neighboring paper, The Anderson Intelligencer, related a story about a serious fire in Easley in the **November 25, 1895** edition of the paper. *"A disastrous fire visited Easley last Monday. The fire broke out in the Easley Democrat office, which was destroyed. From here the flames spread rapidly, and a one story frame house, a two story frame building and a brick building occupied by Hagood and Company were destroyed."*

This fire was also picked up and reported in The People's Journal (another Pickens newspaper) on **November 28, 1895**. *"Fortunately for*

the town of Easley the wind was calm, but four houses were consumed by the flames, before they were checked by the citizens who worked manfully with buckets of water, drawn from the wells around, there being no other means of protection against fire.” Note that this article of 1895 describes a fire being fought by citizen volunteers with only buckets of water drawn from private wells. It clearly indicates the town had no organized fire protection. However, this reporting reveals the interest and possibly the beginning of a mounting effort to provide more efficient fire protection to the town.

The People’s Journal of Pickens printed an advertisement in the **June 3, 1897** paper which points to the need for insurance. *“Messrs. A. W. Hudgens & Son, of Easley, fire insurance agents, come out this week with an advertisement and if you want your property insured it will be to your interest to see them.”*

On **September 16, 1897**, The People’s Journal reports on some precautions a business in Easley was taking against the threat of fire. *“The gin and milling company have built a new plank kiln at the site where the old one was burned some days ago, they have also put a water tank nearby with a hose connected to use in case of fire.”*

The Manning Times, a low-country newspaper, printed a story on **October 29, 1902** about a “narrow escape” near Easley. *“Another accident occurred on the Southern not far from Easley on Tuesday afternoon. The Kenmore brothers were hauling corn, and as they drove across the track, the engine of passenger No. 12 struck the rear end of the wagon, tearing it to pieces and bruising the young men considerably. One had his collar bone broken. They said the wind was blowing so that they could not hear the train as it came around the curve.”*

The **March 16, 1907** edition of The Sentinel-Journal of Pickens tells that *“Fire broke out Monday night in the Easley Cotton Mill warehouse about midnight injuring 120 bales of cotton more or less. The loss is estimated at about \$12,000. It is thought that a rat must have struck a match in the cotton as it caught near the floor. Fortunately a post caught on fire and burned up toward the top putting the sprinkler head into operation. The alarm was given and the hose was turned on in addition. The mill is well protected against fire by sprinkler and hose.”* Writers note: “Thought that a rat must have struck a match”PLEASE!

The Sentinel-Journal of Pickens reported on **June 11, 1908** that *“Tuesday evening fire was discovered in the upstairs of the Lathem building....N. D. Taylor, photographer, occupied the upstairs and when he discovered the fire in an adjoining room, which was filled with coffins, it was raging to such an extent that it was impossible to put it out. The bucket brigade assembled and did what they could, and citizens lent willing hands to try and carry out the stocks of goods. The many friends of these people sympathize with them in this loss. It is very probable that an adequate fire protection will now be put in by Easley.”*

This writer researched The Sanborn Maps of South Carolina, the precursor of today’s ISO (Insurance Services Office), which are detailed maps of U. S. cities and towns in the 19th and 20th centuries. The maps were created to allow fire insurance companies to assess their liabilities against fires. According to a survey done in **September 1908** of the Town of Easley, there was no water works (other than private wells), no fire department, and the streets were made of gravel. The population of the town was approximately 1,200.

The Greenville News reported on **July 25, 1911** that *“The new residence of Mr. Henry Prince, located on the outskirts of town, was totally destroyed by fire this morning about six o’clock. The fire originated in*

the kitchen and made rapid headway to the main part of the house as a very stiff wind was blowing in that direction...before any help could arrive the entire structure was too far gone to be checked."

The **November 2, 1911** edition of The Pickens Sentinel made a brief comment about a fire in a schoolhouse. *"The Holder schoolhouse was destroyed by fire last Friday night. It is not known how the fire originated."*

On **September 18, 1913**, The Pickens Sentinel states that *"The quietness of last Sabbath was suddenly broken about four o'clock by the fire bell ringing. The cause of the alarm was a small blaze at Editor C. T. Martin's new house. The current had been left turned on an electric iron and the iron became red hot, setting a table on fire. The blaze was soon extinguished, and only slight damage was done."*

According to The Pickens Sentinel dated **January 22, 1914** *"The splendid residence of Mrs. Millie Hendricks on Table Rock Street was burned. The fire was supposed to have been started by rats in the kitchen. Very little insurance was carried."* Writer's note: The cause of this fire is interesting in that it was blamed on "rats in the kitchen." While researching the history of other towns and cities, rats were to blame for many "undetermined" fires. However, we know today that this source of ignition was very unlikely.

The Pickens Sentinel said on **May 14, 1914** that *"There was considerable excitement in Easley Tuesday, when it was learned that the large home of Mrs. A. W. Folger was on fire. The house was completely destroyed with nearly all the household goods."*

World War I began on **July 28, 1914** and threw the United States into a period of readiness to fight the enemy on a scale never before experienced. The beginning of the war impacted every community in

the country including South Carolina. Commerce was eventually hurt and significant changes in lifestyles were faced. Many local young men were called up through a system of conscription, an early version of the draft, to maintain necessary military manpower levels.

The Anderson Intelligencer picked up a story from Easley on **October 19, 1915** in which the *“Fire early Sunday morning completely ruined the store of S. C. Folger & Company, next to the post office. The origin of the fire is unknown, but it started (apparently) in the upper story and burned through the floor below.”*

The **July 8, 1915** edition of The Pickens Sentinel announced *“The cotton warehouse of the Easley Cotton Mill was discovered to be afire about four o’clock Monday morning, but the flames were extinguished before a great deal of damage had been done. The origin of the fire is unknown but is supposed to have been incendiary.”*

According to The Pickens Sentinel of **January 18, 1917**, *“A telephone message from Easley says a fire destroyed Sitton’s Livery Stable about six o’clock Tuesday morning and also burned 5 horses and mules to death. Origin of the fire is unknown.”*

Again, The Pickens Sentinel publishes bad news for Easley in their **March 22, 1917** copy of the paper. *“The First Baptist Church building at Easley was completely destroyed by fire Sunday morning. The fire is supposed to have originated from the furnace and was discovered just as Sunday School was closing, but it had then made too much headway to be controlled. A high wind was blowing and it took good work to save the nearby buildings. This handsome church building was of brick veneer construction and was built five years ago at a cost of \$8,000, not including furniture.”*

In the early **spring of 1918**, the “Spanish Flue” made its appearance in South Carolina and became the most severe pandemic in recorded history. Some 675,000 individuals died in the United States, and over 14,500 deaths were recorded in South Carolina alone.

The Pickens Sentinel printed on **August 8, 1918** that *“During an electric storm last Saturday afternoon lightning struck the steeple of the Methodist Church at Easley cotton mills, splintering it from pinnacle to base. During the same afternoon, a cow belonging to Wm. Sanders, who resides near the city, was struck and killed. It is also reported that a hog belonging to L. P. Barton was also struck and killed at the same time.”*

The Greenville News reported in **1918** that *“In precaution against the possible spread of Spanish Influenza, Governor Manning has requested the State Board of Health to issue an order to prevent Ringling Brothers’ Circus from touring the state.”* In still another article, the Greenville News stated, *“In a further effort to stop the disease, Surgeon General Blue, of the public health service, today suggested to all health officers that schools and places of amusement be closed and public meetings discontinued.”*

The Gaffney Ledger reported in their **October 5, 1918** printing of the paper that *“Spanish influenza is reaching an epidemic stage among the civilian population of South Carolina...The worst epidemic is in Newberry where 1,500 cases are reported. The town is under ridged quarantine, and three mills have closed down.”* An article from Spartanburg said, *“One of the unique features of this pandemic was the high mortality rate among healthy people. Coffins and gravediggers could not be found.”*

November 11, 1918 brought elation and delight to America when World War I ended after allied forces gained ground in France and

finally stopped the German onslaught. Church bells, steam whistles, and cries of happiness were heard in every community of the state celebrating the end of the war. Sadly, many young men died in the cause of freedom which touched the lives of nearly every family in Easley and elsewhere.

Mention was made in The Watchman and Southron (a Sumter paper) on **May 17, 1922** about two men being electrocuted at the Easley Water and Light Plant.

Sometime in **1922** the fire department operated with a Model-T fire truck which had a 40 gallon chemical tank along with hose and equipment. According to former Chief Clyde Ellenburg, the town only had ten volunteer firemen.

The Keowee Courier printed on **November 22, 1922** *“That fire, believed to have originated in cotton being ginned when a match was ignited between the combs of the gin, destroyed the ginning plant of the Easley Oil Mill here early this afternoon. The flames spread rapidly in the cotton waste and enveloped the entire building within a few minutes despite the brave fight made with six extinguishers by the employees. The Easley Fire Department was rushed to the scene and did good work, but was unable to get the flames under control. A gentle wind guided the flames away from the oil plant and firemen kept constant streams playing on the roof of the home of W. W. Robinson in such a way as to prevent its catching on fire.”*

The Greenville News provided some insight into Easley’s infrastructure. In **1924** the water plant was expanded and the water supply was changed from a small creek in town to Burdine Creek, four miles above Easley. This would confirm that the town constructed some type of municipal water system a few years earlier, probably around the early part of the decade of the 1920s.

A new siren for the fire department has been installed according to the **May 29, 1924** printing of The Greenville News. *“A large new modern fire siren has been purchased by the city council and installed on the roof of the J. M. Smith Auto Company. The siren is a large one, being pulled by a 5 horsepower motor and can be heard at a distance of 6 to 8 miles.”*

This writer found a bit of interesting trivia from Easley which quoted former Fire Chief Clyde Ellenburg, *“The city’s tower clock was purchased and installed in 1925.”*

On **March 29, 1925**, The Index-Journal, a Greenwood newspaper, reported that, *“A train passing through Easley about midnight early this week blew its whistle loud, long and continuously until the people of Easley Mills No. 3 were aroused to the fact that their community house was on fire. The fire department was soon on the scene, but the building was burned. The origin of the fire has not been determined, insurance partly covered the loss.”*

The Gaffney Ledger reported on a significant fire at Clemson College in the **May 29, 1926** paper. *“The engineering building of Clemson College is a mass of ruins tonight as the result of fire, of unknown origin, which raged unchecked throughout its entirety late this afternoon..some \$300,000 loss. Five Greenville firemen, who rushed here to aid in the fight against the fire, were injured when a brick wall, its foundation weakened by loss of cross-beam supports, crashed to the ground. A call for firefighting assistance was sent to Greenville, Anderson, Seneca, and Easley. One Greenville truck was sent making the run of about 35 miles in 46 minutes. Anderson sent a truck and three men. Easley’s truck was also rushed here. The Seneca truck broke down on the road and did not arrive. On the return trip of the Easley truck, its left rear wheel came off*

as the heavy machine rounded a curve near Liberty. There were no serious results.”

The Greenville News dated **August 4, 1927** reported that *“The fire alarm sounded here Monday afternoon at 2:30 o’clock when a small house caught fire just beyond city hall. The fire apparatus was rushed to the scene and the blaze was soon extinguished. Only small damage was done.”*

An interview by The Greenville News with former Fire Chief Clyde Ellenburg in 1965 stated that the town purchased another fire truck in **1928** which came with a 500 gpm pump. And, at that time the department operated with fifteen volunteer firemen.

In an article from The Greenville News dated **November 15, 1928**, *“Fire Chief Smith was host to the city officials and firemen at an oyster supper at Vick’s Café, on Wednesday evening November 7. The guest were invited to city hall to hear several delightful speeches. R. H. Zachery, representative of the American LaFrance company, explained the new fire truck, equipment, and methods best used to fight fire. H. P. Williams, another representative of the company, made a short talk thanking the firemen for their hospitality, and stated that Easley now has just as good fire equipment as New York City, although not ‘quite’ as much.”*

On **January 19, 1928** The Greenville News reported *“Two Fires In Easley In Three-Day Period.”* The story said, *“Easley’s fire alarm, after a rest of several months, has sounded twice in almost as many days. Saturday afternoon a grass fire threatened a dwelling and some outbuildings on account of a high wind, so the fire department was called, but the blaze was extinguished before the truck arrived. This morning between 3 and 4 o’clock fire, caused by a defective flue, was discovered in the heart of town at the place known as the Briggs house. Although the firemen*

responded quickly and put up a good fight, the flames had gained such headway that the house is a total loss, and only a part of the household goods of A. Ellenburg, who occupied the house, was saved. It is considered most fortunate that no other buildings were burned for this house, set back from the street, is almost surrounded by business houses, and is near the Central school building."

The Greenville News reported on **December 27, 1928** that "A fire destroyed a barn and its contents of feedstuff, Monday afternoon. The barn was a wooden structure with a tin roof and owned by Claude Welborn, farmer and merchant, who lives beyond the city limits on the Easley-Pelzer Road. The Easley fire truck answered the call but were unable to save the barn. The department did good work, however, in saving other near buildings from the flames."

This writer found where Mr. Welborn, mentioned above, had another fire as reported in The Greenville News on **February 20, 1929**. "A small grocery store and restaurant belonging to Claude Welborn was partially destroyed by fire there this morning at one o'clock. The fire originated from an oil stove which exploded while being refilled. The Easley Department made a quick response and soon had the fire under control."

The Greenville News published on **March 10, 1929** tells of Fire Chief Ben Smith entertaining his firemen and guests with a dinner at the Easley High School. Chief Smith shared that Easley now qualifies for a much lower insurance rate. In addition, the Chief told the reporter that "This banquet was made possible by funds furnished by the state insurance commission, which provides a certain amount each year to be used by volunteer fire forces in any manner they wish. It is not enough to pay salaries, hence it is thought an occasional function, such as this banquet, will tend to keep up interest in this important work." Writer's note: The Chief was making reference to the Firemen's Fund (or 1%

Fund) through the S. C. State Firemen's Association...which we still enjoy today. For the fact that Easley was receiving this money further indicates the department was a member of the Firemen's Association. Records reveal the department was a member as far back as 1926.

On **July 10, 1929** The Greenville News headlined with *"Dwelling At Easley Destroyed By Fire."* It picked up the story that *"An eight-room dwelling belonging to Mrs. M. M. Edens was destroyed by fire of unknown origin here last night. The house was situated on the edge of town and was unoccupied. The fire was not discovered until it had made much headway. The Easley Fire Department answered the call but was unable to save the house because the nearest hydrant was 2,000 feet away. This was the first total loss by fire here in twelve months."*

The Greenville News did an article about a festive event for the fire department in Easley on **July 15, 1929**. *"A most delightful dinner was enjoyed Friday evening by members of the Easley Fire Department, the town officials and a number of their friends in the large basement room of the local fire department. This enjoyable occasion was a booster meeting in the interest of the Easley Fire Department. Chief Ben J. Smith of the fire department and his volunteer firemen received many words of praise for the efficiency of the local fire department and the progress it has made, and the splendid work during the last year."*

The Greenville News reported on **September 25, 1929** that *"About 12:30 o'clock Saturday afternoon the Easley Fire Department was called to the home of Dr. and Mrs. C. M. Tripp to extinguish a blaze which was caused by a defective stove flue. Some damage from the fire and water was reported."*

The **October 12, 1930** issue of The Greenville News printed an article during National Fire Prevention Week. *"Much has been said and*

written in the last few years regarding the fire hazards of school buildings and the loss of life of school children due to school fires, but there will be no school fire nor loss of life therefrom in Easley if taking every known precaution is any preventative. During this week, which is National Fire Prevention Week, all six of the Easley school buildings have been inspected by Chief Ben J. Smith and fire drills have been held at each of the schools. Chief Smith also expressed his appreciation for the cooperation given the fire department."

The **April 25, 1933** edition of The Greenville News reported that, "C. D. Ellenburg was recently reelected as chief of the fire department by city council. Mr. Ellenburg has given faithful service in this position."

The Greenville News gave an account of a fire in Easley in their **May 24, 1933** edition. "The building owned by the R. F. Smith estate, at the rear of Reeves Music Store, was completely destroyed by fire here late Saturday afternoon. In the building were stored hay, valued at approximately \$1,000 owned by F. W. Whitmire, six bales of cotton owned by the Smith estate and a number of used cars. The local fire department was able to save the cotton but the other contents and the building itself was totally destroyed. The loss is estimated at about \$1,500 and was only partially insured. The origin of the fire was not determined."

Again, The Greenville News provided good news about Easley on **January 18, 1935**. The headline read, "Easley Fire Loss For Year Is Low." The story continues, "According to information obtained from C. D. Ellenburg of the city fire department, Easley's fire losses for 1934 are less than they have been in many previous years. Fire losses for the year of 1934 are estimated at \$2,260. Losses by fire in the city in 1933 amounted to approximately \$5,055. The city's fire department consists of a chief and 12 volunteer firemen. The department has an average attendance at each fire of 10 of the volunteer men."

Records reveal the town of Easley purchased yet another fire engine in **1936** which was equipped with a 500 gpm pump, and the town had increased their volunteer force to twenty firemen. According to The Greenville News the fire department now operated with two fire trucks. And, Easley had the only municipality owned water and light plant in the county.

The Greenville News once again reported on a serious fire in Easley on **January 24, 1936**. *“Fire of unknown origin greatly damaged a two story house owned by the Mrs. Betty O. Johnson estate on Main Street Tuesday night shortly after 10 o’clock. It had made considerable headway before it was discovered, and the alarm sent in. The fire department extinguished the flames quickly after getting to the scene but due to the lateness of the discovery the interior of the house was practically destroyed.”*

The **October 22, 1939** edition of The Greenville News said, *“A fire late Friday morning at the Easley fertilizer plant here damaged property to the extent of several hundred dollars. The fire originated in the fertilizer department of the plant, and it was not known how it started...the blaze was quickly controlled by the men working at the plant and the city’s fire department.”*

The Greenville News reported on a serious fire and explosion in the **June 29, 1940** printing of the paper. *“As a result of the explosion of a cooking stove a house on the Easley Mill village was completely destroyed by fire here yesterday afternoon about 6 o’clock. The house was completely in flames immediately following the explosion, and a phone not being near, the fire was too far advanced to be extinguished when the Easley Fire Department reached the scene. The fire began when Miss Frances Perry, who was keeping house for the McClellans, started to cook supper and poured kerosene oil into the cooking stove*

that had hot coals in it, and immediately followed the explosion that was heard a few blocks away. Miss Perry was slightly burned, and Jannett McClellan, little daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roy McClellan, was painfully but not seriously burned."

*"Firemen Called To Three Easley Fires", headlined The Greenville News dated **November 20, 1941**. "Fire of unknown origin completely destroyed the garage and car of Remus Robinson, who resided on Catherine Street of this City, Monday night about 11:30 o'clock. Mr. Robinson stated that some grass was burned near the garage Monday afternoon, but that the fire evidently was not caused by any spark from this as it seemingly caught from the interior of the building. The fire department was summoned Tuesday morning about 7:45 for a roof fire in the home of Mrs. A. Ellison on South Fifth Street. Only a small damage was done here. Fire in the boiler room of the Easley Oil Mill was discovered about midnight Saturday. The damage was estimated as slight."*

A few days later still another fire occurred according to The Greenville News on **November 28, 1941**. *"Fire of undetermined origin completely destroyed a two-story barn, a cow, a crib and a large amount of feed stuff belonging to L. M. Ellenburg on Seventh Avenue of this city last night. When the fire department reached the scene the barn was practically in ashes, but the firemen managed to keep the flames from spreading to the garage and other buildings very close by."*

Easley was recruiting volunteer firemen as reported by The Greenville News on **February 8, 1943**. *"The city fire department has begun a new series of practices which will bring into cooperation the fire fighting units at three textile mills. Heretofore practices have been held once a month at the city hall, whereas now there will be a practice weekly at one of the mills in addition to the monthly practice at the city hall. These new practices began two weeks ago when the first one was*

conducted at Alice Mill. The city fire department is in need of experienced volunteer firemen and those who show aptitude at fire practices may be enlisted to help fight fires in Easley. The department has lost a chief and nine volunteer firemen to the Greenville Air Base fire department and other war work. Ed. M. Corn has succeeded Clyde Ellenburg as fire chief but the department still has several openings for volunteer men."

While talking about Chief Ellenburg and his contributions to the fire department, this writer found an article published in 1965 by The Greenville News which is very interesting. *"Easley's fire trucks have more extras than are usually found in most fire stations. Ellenburg is an inventor of sorts. When he sees the need for an extra device to make the equipment more efficient, he designs it and has it made, or makes it himself with materials on hand."*

The article continues, *"A number of years ago he was concerned because of the difficulty some of the volunteer firemen had in knowing just where the fires were and how to get there. He came up with the idea of a 'water trail'. He had a machine shop build a compartment in one side of the truck, and in it Ellenburg installed a 20-gallon water container. This was connected to a valve on the instrument board of the truck. When the valve is opened as the truck moves out of the fire station en route to a fire, the trail begins. Since then, the volunteer firemen have had less difficulty locating fires."*

Again, The Greenville News reported on **April 10, 1943** that *"Two fires occurred in the city during the week, one small house being completely burned and the other damaged to the extent of approximately \$900. On Tuesday afternoon a home on Fleetwood Drive occupied by Mrs. A. Hughey and Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Freeman, was entirely destroyed. The home was so far from a telephone that the fire department didn't*

receive the call until the roof of the house was falling in and when it arrived on the scene the building was completely enveloped in flames.”

On **January 28, 1945**, The Greenville News reported that *“Forty bales of cotton belonging to R. C. McCall, of this city, were damaged by fire Saturday night about 6 o’clock. The cotton was stored in an old laundry building owned by Easley Mill and rented for storage purposes. The origin of the fire is not definitely known. Mr. McCall praised the work of the fire department, stating that the quick response and efficiency of the men in the department resulted in the light damage to the cotton and prevented the fire from spreading.”*

“Easley Department Answers 60 Calls” according to the **January 8, 1946** edition of The Greenville News. *“Chief Ed Corn of the Easley Fire Department, reports that the department answered 60 calls during the past year, 37 of which were for grass and miscellaneous small fires that were easily extinguished. The fire losses for the entire year amounted to only about \$2,125, of which \$1,125 was covered by insurance.”*

The **December 19, 1946** issue of The Greenville News relates that *“New Automatic Fire Alarm Saves Easley Force Delay.”* The article goes on to say, *“When a night call comes in to the Easley Fire Department now it is answered without a minute’s delay. Immediately after he receives the call, Chief M. O. Bolding or Assistant Chief J. E. Lewis, whichever is on duty, reaches for the automatic switch of the new fire alarm machine which Chief Bolding invented, sets the lever for the red number indicating the ward where the fire is, and is on his way.”*

“If the fire should happen to be in ward five, the fireman on duty has only to switch on the current and set the lever on the number five. The machine will automatically sound the siren five times, indicating the direction of the fire to the volunteer firemen, and then cut off.”

The Greenville News reported on **January 23, 1948** that *“Easley’s Fire Chief and 16 Volunteers Resign.”* Apparently, politics had entered the fire department sufficient to cause the volunteers and Chief Mack ‘Obie’ Bolding to quit. The article states that 10 street department employees and 7 town policemen had been instructed to stand by for duty in the event of a fire. Some of the firemen told news reporters that Chief Bolding had not been given a free hand in running the department.”

A safe resolution to the resignation of Easley’s firemen is found in the **February 8, 1948** Greenville News. The headlines read, *“Easley Firemen Return To Force.”* *“The Easley Fire Department is operating normally again according to an announcement by Fire Chief Obie Bolding, and the volunteer personnel is about up to requirements. The former trouble which brought about the resignations of Chief Bolding and the volunteer firemen was a matter between the chief and the City Council, and not between the Chief and the volunteer firemen.”*

“Lewis Returns To Easley Fire Post,” were the caption for an article found in The Greenville News dated **April 11, 1949**. *“G. E. Lewis, former assistant chief of the City Fire Department who recently resigned to accept a position in Charleston, was renamed to the Easley post at a meeting of the City Council Tuesday night. He and his family moved back to Easley this week and he resumed his duties with the department Friday.”*

As this point in the research of the Easley Fire Department, this writer now puts down his pen after chronicling the first seventy-five years of the organization’s history. It truly has been an interesting project to uncover some of the department’s stories and legacy which had probably been lost through time or else forgotten by generations long past. Now, the rest of the department’s history from 1949 to the present is up to others to complete...that’s seventy-five more years of

stories to put to pen. It is this writer's hope that someone will take the challenge and catch up this department's rich heritage and keep our legacy alive!

A list of Easley's former and more recent fire chief's is provided below. Some of the dates may not be exactly accurate because of minor discrepancies in newspaper accounts. Additionally, the names of individuals who may have assumed leadership roles during those early "bucket brigade" days have not been revealed in print. However, one can be sure that the founders of the town, Col. Robert Holcombe and William K. Easley, were always out front doing what they could to protect from fire the little town they were creating.

Chief Ben J. Smith (early 1920s-1931)

Chief C. D. Ellenburg (1931-1942)

Chief Ed M. Corn (1942-1946)

Chief Mack 'Obie' Bolding (1946-1952)

Chief C. D. Ellenburg (1952-1965)

Chief Jimmie Cobb (1965-1987) (served as President of S. C. State Firefighters' Association)

Chief Paul Masterson (1987-1993)

Chief Butch Womack(1993-2019)(served as President of S. C. State Firefighters' Association)

Chief Matthew Littleton (2020-To Present)

Provided below is a timeline of fire apparatus operated by the Easley Fire Department from its organization until 1983:

"Bucket Brigade" (1873-early 20th Century)

1st Motorized Model T Chemical Fire Truck w/ 49 gal. tank (1922)

2nd Motorized American LaFrance 500 gpm pumper (1928)

3rd Another 500 gpm pumper (1936)

4th A 750 gpm pumper (1956)

5th A 1,250 gpm tanker w/ 2,500 gallon capacity w/ dual foam system (1983)

Another bit of trivia...the fire department acquired a frisky bulldog named "Bumper" in 1973.