

History of the Roxboro Fire Department

This report has been compiled following interest shown in fire service in Roxboro and Person County and the desire to share whatever could be found in our records with those interested. It was conceived in a spirit of dedication to those courageous firefighters who are on call day and night protecting citizens and their property from the disaster that uncontrolled fire can bring.



Much of the material contained in this report was taken from the records of the City of Roxboro. Unfortunately, many of the old records of the Fire Department have been destroyed. This report is by no means complete but it is intended to give a general picture of the period and to act as a starting point or a guide to those interested in this history.

We have found on old maps of the Town of Roxboro that in 1900 the fire department had 9 volunteers with 2 independent hose carts and no steam or hand engines. The population was 1500.

Organized 1902:

In talking with the retired firemen, they seem to think that the Fire department was organized in 1902. They remembered the two hand reels and said one was located on each end of town and all the citizens of Roxboro were volunteer firemen. A bell was located in the court house. When they would ring the bell, everyone would run to the end of town to get the reel and pull it to the fire. I was told that there was no fire chief at this time, but Melvin O'Briant was the fire inspector and took charge of all the fires.



1905

There were now 10 volunteer firemen. The population was still about 1500.

OCTOBER 07, 1915:

First records to mention the fire dept.

City Clerk was C. C. Cunningham.

Mayor and Fire Chief was J. M.

O'Briant.

In talking with retired firemen, I learned that all the equipment the City Fire Dept. had at that time was two hand pulled hose reels and the volunteer firemen were the citizens of Roxboro. In a report submitted to the City Manager of Roxboro) by Chief O'Briant. It was reported that the Fire Department had two hand reels and eight hundred (800')



feet of good hose and two hundred (200 ') feet of medium hose all of which was in good condition. This report was submitted on May 09, 1917.

February 01, 1916 :

J. M. O'Briant and N. Lunsford were appointed members of the Firemen's Relief Fund.

April 10, 1916: J. M. O'Briant and S. B. Davis were elected as Fire Inspectors.

May 05, 1917: W. I. Newton was elected Mayor of Roxboro and R. G. Cole was Fire Chief. No records could be found in this area on fires or operation of the fire department.

August 15, 1924: Earl Bradsher was Fire Chief (partly paid), 1 assistant Chief and 10 volunteers and 2 hand carts. During the past years if there was a fire at night they would have to go down to Longhurst Mill on Depot St. and have the night watch man turn on the fire pump to feed the water system up Depot and down Main Street. S. A. Oliver was Police Chief.

January 06, 1925: Regular business meeting of the City of Roxboro, It was presented to the City to build a fire station and to hire full time firemen and to purchase a 750 GPM fire pumper. The motion passed and the bids were taken.

April 07, 1925: Following bids were received and opened:

Obenchain-Boyer Company

2. American LaFrance Foamite Corp.

3. Childs Fire Equipment Company

E. G. Long made the motion to accept the bid from American LaFrance of \$ 12,500.00 and J. J. Winstead seconded the motion. The City paid \$ 11, 875.00 for the American LaFrance.

August 04, 1925: The 1925 model American LaFrance, affectionately known today as "Old Betsy" arrives in Roxboro. George W. Kane contracted to build the fire station for \$ 3,000.00. Jack Oliver was the first full time fireman at a salary of \$ 75.00 per month.

December 07, 1926: Jack Oliver resigned as fire truck driver and B. B. Whitt was elected fire truck driver and town deputy at a salary of \$ 100.00 per month.

January 03, 1928: L. K. Walker was the third fire truck driver and policeman. Howard Frank, "Mr. Frank", was the first fire truck

mechanic.

THIRD FIRE CHIEF: P. C. Adams.

July 01, 1928: J. E. Broadhead was elected the fourth fire chief to fill the vacancy of P. Cary Adams.

June 05, 1930: J. M. O'Briant was elected Fire Chief and J. E. Latta was elected Assistant Fire Chief

June 01, 1937: Henry O'Briant was named Fire Chief to fill the vacancy of his father and was chief until January 08, 1947

January 08, 1947: Fred Long was elected Fire Chief.

MAY 02, 1947: In the regular business meeting of the Mayor and Commissioners, O. T. Kirby and J. W. Green were nominated by mass meeting for commissioners to serve during the next term.

The following offers to supply the town with fire truck and engine were made:

Maxim \$ 11,750.00, Buffalo \$ 12,391.00, Mack \$ 12,980.00

LaFrance \$12,516.00, Segrave \$ 13,200.00,

After a full discussion of the various offers, during which the American LaFrance was recommended by the Chief of the Fire Department and after its purchase, it having been requested by the City Manager, the following resolution was introduced on motion of R. C. Hall, seconded by C. M. Mickie was passed unanimously.

Resolution

It appearing and being found by the Board that the bid submitted by American LaFrance Foamite Corporation is the best of bids submitted for the sale of fire truck and engine. Due consideration being given to the relative efficiency and to the needs of the town, and it appearing and being found that the fire truck offered by them is adapted to the needs of the town and the price offered is reasonable; both the Chief of the Fire Department and the City Manager having recommended its acceptance.

October 01, 1954: Thomas Dixon Gunter, Jr. was appointed Captain of the Roxboro Fire Department and was the first paid Captain.

January 01, 1954: A meeting was called of the Fire Department to purchase one fire engine for the County. "Old Betsy" was the only engine used in the County at this time and was not efficient. It only carried fifty gallons of water. The firemen went to the manufacturing

plants and other places of business to raise the money to buy a Fire Engine for the County. The first County Fire Engine was a 1954 Oren, with a 500-gpm pump and carried five hundred gallons of water. The Fire Department realized a need for a tank truck and made one from a school Bus chassis, that carried 800 gallons of water.

January 01,1956: The Fire Department again with donations purchased on 1956 Chevy Chassis and had Alexander Welding, which is now EEG Fire Apparatus builders to put the fire truck on it. This tanker carried a 1,000 gallons of water.

July 01,1959: Thomas D. Gunter, Jr. was appointed Fire Chief and Luther Van Dixon was appointed Asst. Fire Chief.

AUGUST 1964: The Fire Department moved into a new building on Court Street, where it is presently located. The equipment at this time was "Old Betsy" The 1948 American LaFrance, 1954 Ford Oren, 1956 Chevy Alexander.

FEBRUARY 1966: The City of Roxboro ordered one 1966 Ford Fire Engine by FMC

June 1968: The County ordered one 1968 Ford F~C to replace the 1954 Ford.

August 1972: The County replaced the 1956 Chef. tanker with a 1972 FCC on a Ford Chassis.

JULY 1977: The County replaced the 1968 FCC with a 1977 Ford FCC pumper.

July 1979: The City of Roxboro ordered one 1979 Ford FCC 1,000 GPM pumper.

JULY 31, 1980: Thomas d. Gaunter, Jr. Retired from the Fire Department

January, 1981: Roy Woodrow (Buddy) Hall was appointed Fire Chief and Graves Elmo Dixon was appointed Asst. Fire Chief. (Elmo was stabbed in the Wendy's parking lot in Durham, N. C. Saturday, March 10, 1984 around 8:30 p.m. and died)

March, 1990: The Fire Department has a supplemental retirement program through the Firemen's Relief Fund. This program was started in 1989 by Dr. Ray Howell, III, Bobby Harris, John Poole and W. Ruffing Woody, Jr.

Mr. Horace Moore, representing the N. C. State Firemen's Relief Fund Program attended the meeting to set up our local program, along with Jerry Grimes. Fire Chief Buddy Hall was also present at this meeting. Firemen received checks up to \$ 150.00 per month from this retirement

fund.

Equipment, 1994: The Fire Department now has three (3) pumpers for the City and two (2) for the County and one (1) Ladder truck and one (1) mini pumper as follows;

City

1972 750 GPM Howe

1979 1,000 GPM FMC

1976 1,500 GPM American LaFrance

County

1977 1,000 GPM FMC

1981 250 GPM Mini-Pumper

1988 1,000 GPM FMC

City & County

1967 100' American LaFrance Ladder

We still have the 1925 American LaFrance (Old Betsy) and the 1948 American LaFrance. We have three cars, two (2) 1989 Fords and one (1) 1994 Ford Chiefs Car. We have one (1) Squad Truck 1977 Dodge.

Person County had only one fire Department until 1958 when the Hurdle Mills Fire department was organized. Since that time we have other communities in Person county that have organized departments and we now have nine (9) fire departments in the County with (1) currently to be organized. Roxboro and Person County has come a long way since 1902 in so far as fire fighting is concerned.

Compiled March 09, 1990 By:

Roy W. (Buddy) Hall Fire Chief

Roxboro Fire Department

Revised October 07, 1994 By:

Roy W. (Buddy) Hall

1995 Roxboro Fire Department started responding to first responder calls.

1997 Took delivery of a 1998 American La France Engine.

1998

Chief Roy W. (Buddy) Hall retired.

Captain John I Gentry Jr. was named the new Fire Chief

At this time there were 14 full time paid firefighters and about 40 volunteers.

We added another firefighter per shift.

2000 We added another 2 firefighters per shift bringing the total of full-time firefighters to 23 with 15 volunteers.

2001 Added station Two and Three. Equipment includes

Engine 1:

1988 Quality. 1000 gallon tank with a 1000 GPM pump

Rescue 1,

1976 American Lafrance: It was refurbished in 2004

Squad 1

1999 Ford, 300 gallon tank with a 250 GPM pump.

"Old Betsy"

1925 American Lafrance, 50 gallon tank with a 750 GPM Pump.

Engine 2

1997 American Lafrance 1000 Gallon tank with a 1500 GPM pump

Ladder 1

2002 RK Ladder, 300 Gallon Tank with a 1250 GPM Pump

Engine 3,

2001 E-One American Eagle, 1000 gallon tank with a 1250 GPM pump

Engine 5

1977 Ford FMC, 750 gallon tank with a 750 GPM Pump

2003 The Roxboro Fire Department started into the rescue field with high and low angle, confine space and trench.

July 2005: Fire Chief John Gentry resigned to take a job training firefighters in Iraq.

November 2005: Fire Chief Jonathan N. Rorie was named the new chief of Roxboro.

December 2006: Fire Chief Jonathan N. Rorie resigned to take a job in the private sector.

March 2007: Fire Chief Kenneth Torain was named the new chief of Roxboro. Kenneth initially joined the department in 1994 and became a full time firefighter in 1996. By 1999 he had worked his way up to captain. "I was born and raised in Roxboro" Chief Torain.