

Tucson Fire Department
William F. Greer, TFD History (Notes)
Tucson — The Early Days



Book traces 100 years of city Fire Department

The story of the first 100 years of the Tucson Fire Department is now available in an illustrated book for \$24.

Containing both color and black-and-white photos, the book traces the department's history from its origins amid the stale beer and smoke of the old Gem Saloon through the 1,550-degree heat of 1970's Pioneer International Hotel fire.

Capt. Duane Stutz, Fire Department information officer, said the idea for the volume was hatched last June, during the department's Fire Fair centennial celebration.

Stutz and three other department employees took on a second job for the next six months, sifting through old photos and records to compile the 144-page edition.

The text was written by William F. Greer, an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Arizona.

"It's a memorial for past members of the department," Stutz said, "and a keepsake for present members."

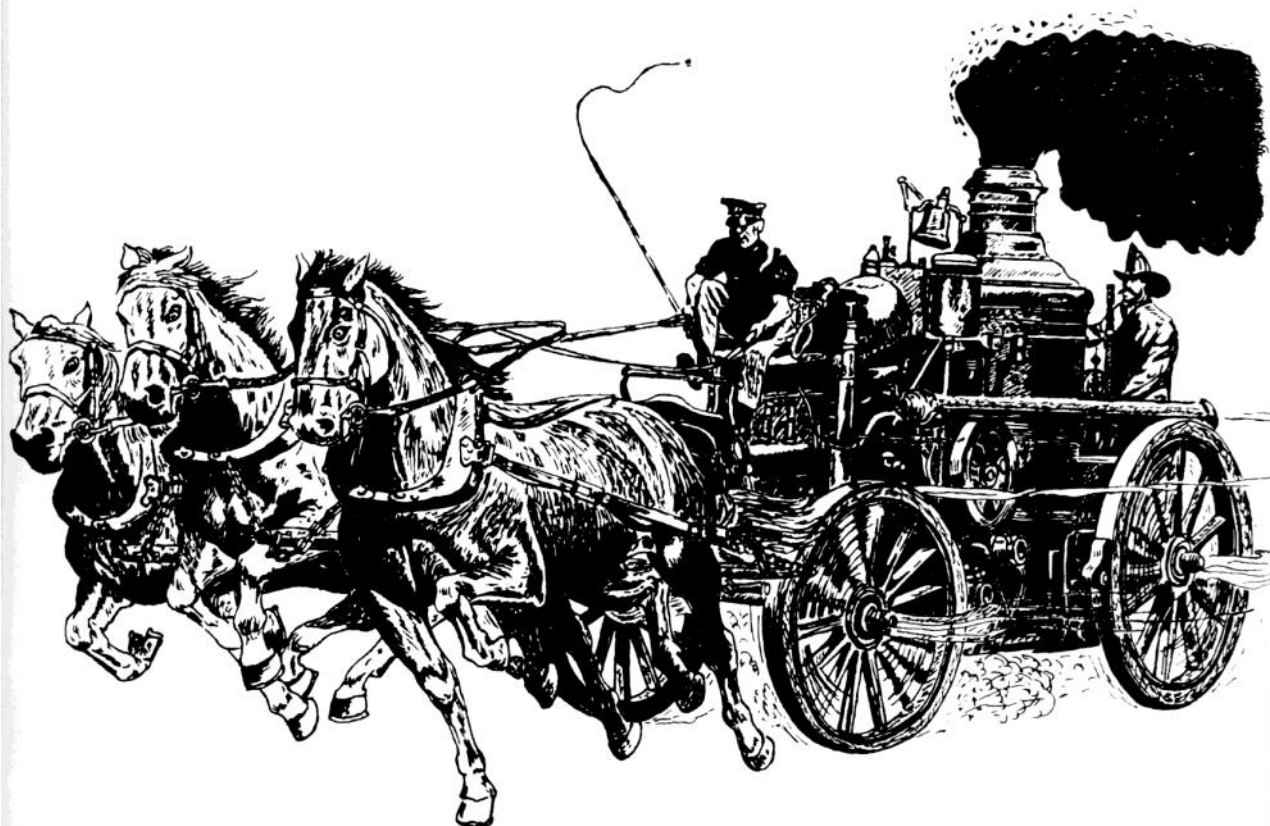
Stutz said copies can be purchased through the department's headquarters at 265 S. Church Ave.

Book chronicles fires

A century of battling fires here is chronicled in a recently released book about the Tucson Fire Department.

The 140-page, illustrated volume, "1881-1891, A Century of Progress," sells for \$24. Copies are available at department headquarters at 265 S. Church Ave. Interested buyers may call the department's Mary Armstrong at 791-4759.

Capt. Duane Stutz, department spokesman, said the book was six months in the making. He and three other employees compiled photographs and records for the volume. It was written by William Greer of the University of Arizona Journalism Department.



Tucson—the Early Days

By William F. Greer

Edited by Donald W. Carson, Head of Journalism Department, University of Arizona.

The history of the Tucson Fire Department was written by William F. Greer. Greer is a veteran news reporter, editor and photographer who has brought his newsroom experience to the classroom as a professor in the Journalism Department at the University of Arizona. Professor Greer began his professional career on Tucson and Phoenix daily newspapers then switched to the Associated Press in Tucson. As a Tucson newsman, covering the Fire Department was a regular part of his duties. Professor Greer's 12-year career with the Associated Press took him to Phoenix, El Paso, New York, Denver, San Francisco, Dallas, Northern Mexico and Chicago. He joined the University of Arizona Journalism Department in the fall of 1980.

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Inside this tan world of desert, buildings and streets lived some 7,000 persons. They were going through exciting times.

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residents were the less frequent Indian raids. Tucson residents, mostly Papago Indians and pioneers of Mexican descent, raided the Apache tribe nearly as much as the Apaches attacked the people of the southern Arizona territorial city.

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Hangings were spectator events. (One old drawing showed a cowboy whipping a horse pulling a buckboard carrying four unfortunate men whose necks were tied to a log above.)

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TUCSON -- THE EARLY DAYS

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FIRST TRAIN

The first Southern Pacific railroad tracks reached Tucson in March, 1880.

According to newspaper accounts and other historical data, 1881 was a big year for the little town.

Tucson did not have many outside world connections.

The Pacific Mail Line, an overland stagecoach, passed through Tucson on its route from San Diego to La Mesilla, near Las Cruces, New Mexico.

On the first day of 1881, wire connections were made connecting Yuma, Tucson and nearby Tombstone with the nation. Tucsonans also used their first telephone exchange in 1881.

Those early Tucson residents -- mostly Indians and Mexicans, but a few Anglos, Chinese and Blacks -- were not concerned about natural disasters.

Southern Arizona had not been rocked by earthquakes.

Few tornadoes slipped into the desert, even though summer cloudbursts moving in on blistering days mixed up perfect conditions for the dark fingers of wrath from the sky.

Only the edges of hurricanes that moved in off the Sea of Cortez could reach Tucson, fanning the city with gentle breezes.

Dry summers, bandits and rattle snakes may have been the biggest cause for concern. X

NO MENTION OF A FIRE DEPARTMENT

There was no mention of a Fire Department as fire certainly was not on the minds of a majority of the townspeople. They might have thought about it when they read news reports of gutted buildings in Tombstone, about 80

miles to the southeast.

But Tucson was safe, they felt. After all, Tombstone's businesses -- saloons and other establishments catering to the miners -- were fashioned from wood.

Tucson was primarily adobe. Everyone knew wood burned. Adobe didn't.

As more wood was used in Tucson buildings, fires would become larger and more frequent.

The primary causes of fires were oil lamps, spontaneous combustion and rats chewing on wooden matches. It seemed many of the businesses that burned kept a good supply of matches and rats in the back rooms. *

SALOON MEETINGS

Saloon meetings in one of those establishments with both matches and rats was where the first Tucson fire unit developed under the fumes and stale smoke and stale beer around a table at the Gem Saloon at Congress Street and Warren Avenue.

These barroom meetings -- the beginnings of a firefighting group -- were frequent during the months of June and July in 1881.

The concerned residents and would-be firefighters gathered to discuss, argue and grouse over important positions in the Tucson Fire Association they were forming.

There was no mention of a fire department in the 1879 city budget.

Jealousy, arguments about non-workers on the committee and rivalries among ambitious men seeking the top fire department offices were apparent in all the formative meetings.

It was called the Tucson Fire Association, the Tucson Fire Comany and the Tucson Hook and Ladder Company. Those who called it the latter were dreaming, for a real hook and ladder outfit was a long way down the road.

At any rate, it was a strong-character beginning among strong-character men that resulted finally in a strong-character firefighting outfit.

Tucsonan M.P. Light was chairman of the original committee forming the department. Mark Lully was listed as acting secretary. The names of the other 18 men who sat around the tables at the Gem have been lost in history.

During those rather informal committee meetings where members argued into the late hours several major fires singed the city.

The Eagle Mills building burned down. It was reported the owner was so mad he immediately spent \$7,000 for a steam pump and tank to keep on the premises.

Another blaze during the middle of the month started in the Dachens building at Church Plaza and Mesilla Street. The fire spread to a nearby liquor distributor's building and caused more than \$6,000 damage before it reached some good old adobe walls and stopped.

LOOTING

There was no mention of a Tucson Fire Department in newspaper accounts of the Eagle Mills and Church Plaza Fires. It was interesting to note that looting was not a crime partial to the 20th Century in places like Watts, Detroit, New York and Miami. One Arizona Weekly Star story said three deputy police officers who tried to "rescue" merchandise from the burning liquor warehouse were fined \$20 each by Marshal Adolf Buttner.

The Church Plaza fire was called one of the most destructive blazes in the city's history causing approximately \$6,000 damage.

During the most active formative period of the Tucson firefighting organization, the Arizona Telephone Company made a proposal to the City Council to supply fire alarm boxes and circuitry. At that time, the newspaper was the telephone company's only customer.

BUCKETS, AXES AND ALARMS

On June 26, 1881, the council discussed the telephone alarm system.

The telephone company submitted a proposal to install the first 20 boxes. Under the proposed 10-year contract, the city would pay for extra boxes at a cost of \$15 per alarm. The phone company agreed to install and maintain boxes and lines and introduce improvements over the years for a charge of \$750 down and \$100 per year for the remainder of the contract time.

After coucilmen heard the telephone company spokesman agree to throw in two Babcock fire extinguishers, they approved the deal and asked the attorney to draw up the papers.

At the same meeting, councilmen authorized purchase of the fire associations first equipment.

The inventory included:

--- 3 bullets

--- 22 rubber buckets

--- Six axes

--- Six picks

--- Nine shovels

--- And of course, the two Babcocks, described as not much more than a bucket with a pump handle sticking out.

This supply would have to hold the fire department through its first stormy year.

About the time city councilmen were passing actions forcing all factories to install spark arrestors in smokestacks, another disaster hit Tucson.

EXPLOSION

A powder magazine located near the old stage road northwest of town exploded. Witnesses said a pillar of flame rose high into the sky and the explosion left a 15-foot crater with ground too hot to touch.

Frame doors, windows and furniture in nearby homes were damaged. An adobe wall collapsed at one residence when a pole fell against the house. Rescuers pulled two children from the rubble. There were no casualties. Nearly every Tucson building was damaged.

The inferno was started by spontaneous combustion in the stored supply of gun cotton, a substance used in cannons.

The blast reportedly was felt as far as 100 miles east of Tucson at Fort Grant.

Gun cotton found in another magazine in the area was moved two miles out of town.

Ironically, a city ordinance required storage of such materials at least one mile outside town. According to newspaper reports, the County Board of Supervisors did not enforce the ordinance.

The wooden structured town of Tombstone was interested in the talk of the new Tucson Fire Company. The Tombstone Nugget gave some space to a story on the hook and ladder company and the purchase of the buckets and shovels.

OPERA HOUSE BENEFITS

In July and August, members of the Tucson Hook and Ladder Company kept attending meetings at the saloon and Levin's Hall.

The fire company published a card of thanks to Miss Inez A. Sexton expressing gratitude for a \$200 donation she netted in a late concert at the Opera House.

In August, 1881, meeting with 30 persons present, the firefighters decided to try to raise \$1,700 for a Champion Babcock hook and ladder truck. Firemen were told the new beauty could hold more than 100 gallons of extinguisher. The firemen wanted a model with a 50-foot ladder, six extra ladders, six extinguishers, lanterns and buckets.

The dream of modern equipment would come true long after the struggling young department's first real trial that August.

FIRST TEST

That first test involved a blaze at William Zeckendor building.

One account read:

"The telephone sounded the alarm in all directions, soon the Hook and Ladder Company came up, and active work on the building commenced. Many citizens helped. Foreman D. J. "Jack" Boleyn used 100 blankets to help extinguish the blaze...also Babcock extinguishers under Second Assistant Fireman D. J. Tobin proved our fire company is of excellent material."

The article said postal clerk W. L. Brooks was one of the most active firemen.

Apparently, a coal oil lamp left burning by clerks who lived in the store exploded and started the fire. The clerks, according to the article, "barely escaped".

Nature looked kindly on the Tucson firefighters and helped them combat their first assignment. A dirt roof over the clothing room caved in smothering the flames and saving much of

the wholesale merchandise. Damage was estimated at \$30,000 to \$45,000.

In the days following the spectacular fire, the department's canvassing committee collected more than \$800 from the now-concerned business owners.

By the end of summer when all alarm boxes had been installed, keys were available at convenient locations near the alarms. All policemen carried keys.

Four months later, the Arizona Weekly Star printed a list of box key locations. The article instructed, "Paste this in your hat".

Insert attachment here

Location of Fire-Alarm Boxes CAPS

The City Marshal and Telephone Superintendent have completed the Telegraphic fire-alarm box system in Tucson. The boxes are all placed and the keys left at convenient places. The locations are as follows:

Box No. 1, at corner of Pearle and Pennington streets. Key at Dodge's Lodging House.

Box No. 2, at corner of Main and Franklin streets. Key in the corral.

Box No. 3, at corner of Court and Franklin. Key at grocery.

Box No. 4, Court and Alameda. Key at the house of L. C. Hughes.

Box No. 5, Stone avenue and Alameda. Key at No. 18 Stone avenue.

Box No. 6, Stone avenue and Congress. Key at 400 Congress.

Box No. 7, at Telephone office with key.

Box No. 8, at S.P.R.R. Depot. Key in Dispatcher's office.

Box No. 9, Military Plaza. Key at the house of Judge Wood.

Box No. 10, Stone avenue, at Fronteriza office, with key.

Box No. 11, Kennedy and Meyer. Key at grocery store.

Box No. 12, McCormick and Main, Key at Surveyor General's office.

Box No. 13, Main street, at house of J.J. Hamburg, with key.

Box No. 14, Stone avenue and Ochoa. Key at residence of Col. J. H. Toole.

Box No. 15, Congress and Stone avenue. Key at School-house.

Box No. 16, Simpson and Court, Key at grocery store.

Box No. 17, Convent and McCormick. Key at 301 Convent.

Box No. 18, Convent and Camp street. Key at Crossley's market.

(Paste this in your hat.)

Taken from the Arizona Weekly Star
December 22, 1881

Eight pt times Roman

13.5 pica cols

40 picas long

FIRST BELL

Meanwhile, in further efforts to get a quick start on fires, the new Tucson firefighters ordered a bell at a cost of \$462. The 1,447-pound bell was being shipped from Boston with a freight bill of \$75.

The placing of the three-quarter ton clanger became a controversy.

Early in November, it was announced that the bell would be set in a tower to be erected at Church Plaza. During a council meeting that month, bids of about \$1,000 (not including the stone foundation) were entered for the construction of the tower. One member opposed the tower, calling it an "unnecessary expense". Others suggested the 16-foot square room in the tower could be rented for \$35 a month to gain revenue to pay for the structure. Another councilman said it could be used by the Marshal's office.

One councilman suggested saving money by putting the bell atop the county courthouse. The mayor did not want his bell on a county building. Finally, the \$1,044 bid was accepted specifying the Church Plaza tower be finished in 30 days. One concerned citizen offered to rent the tower room for \$25 monthly on a five-year lease.

The firemen were not alone in their stormy, argumentative meetings. Such emotion-packed scenes were a part of the times.

The same week the coucil was debating the bell tower, a fire broke out in the Palace Hotel oil room. It was "quickly extinguished" by the fire company using its Babcock extinguishers, according to the news reports.

The fire bell was in place late in 1881, but the controversy continued.

A newspaper story said the bell was too well enclosed. The story asked, "Why would it not be a first class idea to wrap the clapper up to prevent wear and tear?" The editors, in the sarcastic tone, showed they were afraid the bell could not be heard all over town.

The bell was moved in 1882 when the fire department and city hall moved from the old town hall area. The bell stayed at that new fire station on Church Street until 1909.

With the bell firmly in place, the Tucson Fire Department was to see many changes in 1882.

AWAKEN THE OPERATORS

In January of that year, the Arizona Telephone Company received permission to locate a central office in the second story room of the bell tower.

The fire alarm boxes terminated at that telephone office. The idea was that with such termination facilities the bell could be hit faster upon receiving an incoming signal.

The idea seemed great except for one catch.

The teen-age boys hired as telephone operators often dozed.

On occasion, passersby were seen tossing pebbles at the

second floor windows to awaken the operators, also known as bellkeepers.

In later years, an electromagnetic system was installed so the bell would ring when the alarm box was activated.

During the first month of 1882, the financial report for 1881 was announced. It read:

~~999~~ Fire alarm boxes = \$760

7 ~~999~~ Bell = \$462

--- Bell Tower = \$1,700

(Three bullets,

--- (Fire extinguishers, buckets, axes, shovels and picks=\$250)

--- Extra charges for extinguishers = \$85

From the looks of that financial report, it appeared about \$3,257 had been spent with no sign of the fancy firewagon everyone was so excited about. It also was strange that the Babcock extinguishers were listed when earlier accounts said they were an incentive and freebies in the telephone alarm box deal.

Tucson streets, previously dark except for lights shining from doorways and windows, brightened in March of 1882 with the installation of gas street lights.

The next month the city engineer said the population had reached 10,000 and the town needed a real water system. He suggested a gravitational water system from the Santa Cruz River.

An example supporting the engineer's idea was quick to hit Tucson.

FIRE STARTS CONTROVERSY

The bell got one of its first big trials in May, 1882, when it pealed just three minutes after flames were discovered at Goldschmidt's Furniture Store on Meyer Street. Within 15 minutes, the fire crews started using buckets to splash the rambling blaze.

The Arizona Weekly Citizen, playing on this big fire, called for a reorganization of the department. The story reported a lack of organization in fighting the fire that probably started from spontaneous combustion in a manure pile at a stable next door to the furniture store.

Noting that the roof fell in before the fire was extinguished, the editors called for a thorough investigation of the department and its equipment. The editors felt they would get better response from merchants following the \$30,000 blaze.

The engineer also got his point across through the article, stating:

"This calamity painfully demonstrates the necessity of a proper water supply and fire engine." Wagons brought water to the fire.

Before celebrating its first birthday, Tucson's first firefighting organization died in the spring of 1882.

DISBAND AND START AGAIN

Only 12 members sat in on the May 27, 1882, meeting. It was not strange that the membership and excitement had dwindled because the community had done so little to support the fledgling group. Fire company vice president Harry Gutch presided at the meeting. Treasurer H. C. Kiesel reported funds of \$131.15.

Bitter remarks were aimed at citizens promoting establishment of a new organization without regard to the original outfit.

Despite the bitter feelings and sadness of the occasion, the primary leader of Tucson's fire organizations -- D. J. "Jack" Boleyn made the motion to disband the unit. The reason for disbanding, he said, was because the group did not live up to the fire association constitution, which called for 25 to 65 supporting members.

The treasurer divided the \$131.15 evenly among the men at the meeting. The parental company of the Tucson Fire Department was gone.

The next day about 30 men--some from the previous organization--sat down at the Capital Saloon for a meeting and a drink. They discussed the need for a new fire company and commented on recent fires in Tucson and Tombstone.

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In a letter to the editor that day, the former fire chief of Victoria, British Columbia, Edward Coker said the council needed to levy a special tax to produce revenue for the department.

Coker, a former San Francisco fireman who now resided in Tucson, said the tax revenue should be used to purchase a first-class, double-decker firefighting unit known by West Coast firemen as a "Philadelphia fire engine". He did not consider the Babcocks, hooks and ladders sufficient.

Several days after the gathering at the Capital Saloon, and almost a year to the day from the first Tucson firefighters' meeting, a new group was formed.

The new Tucson Volunteer Fire Association had 15 members with Sam Baird named chief and Boleyn taking the foreman position. A fire communications board was created to work with the council.

On June 6, the council decided to hold a special election on the question of raising \$15,000, which would include--among various city uses-funds for firefighting apparatus.

Meanwhile, several fires, including a \$15,000 harness shop blaze struck the town.

A WATER SYSTEM

In mid-June, the council received a letter from the fire association asking for a new hook and ladder truck, two hose carriages, 1,000 feet of rubber-lined hose and another third class chemical fire engine. The association was fully organized with most of the experienced firemen from the previous group. The men said all they needed was the proper equipment. They also asked for an engine house and a water system.

The water came in September, 1882. Reports said the first flow through the city mains could throw a 50-foot stream.

The water started at the Santa Cruz River and poured down a six-mile, 11-inch triangular viaduct. At Main and McCormick Streets it fed into a four and six-inch main system.

"A GOOD DOSE OF BOOT LEATHER"

The first test for the newly formed department was a blaze at the H. J. Brown Crockery House. The firefighters in a bucket brigade held the damage to \$8,000 without using the Santa Cruz system because it was not perfected.

Even though Marshal Buttner posted a group of deputies to cordone off the fire scene, several thieves grabbed at the goods. Their punishment was "a good dose of boot leather".

Shortly after New Year's Day, 1883, work on the Southern Pacific tracks east of Tucson was completed and the city finally was on a transcontinental line.

Ordinances passed in May officially created a fire department and established fire regulations.

By the Fourth of July, a two-story fire house was built. A little later that month the volunteers had two new hose carts and the 1,000 feet of hose.

The new engine house on Church Street was 37 X 60 feet with room for two pieces of large equipment. Cost of the building complex, which included the police station and city hall, was \$9,260.

In August, Jack Boleyn was named Fire Chief.

Pioneer Hose Company No. 1, the men who pulled the hose cart,

Pioneer Hose Company No. 1, the men who pulled the hose cart, was part of the department.

On August 30 it was official--the city erected a flagpole atop the fire department's headquarters.

DRILL TIME

Volunteers met for drills each Friday. The training paid off late on the night of September 15, 1883. It took the volunteers 90 minutes to subdue a blaze. They were lauded in an article stating, they worked in "quiet and prompt execution of their duty."

In apparent anticipation of more equipment, the firemen ordered three dozen wrenches.

The busy volunteers then opened a reading room in the fire house. It was described in one account as "Practically the first public library opened in Tucson."

In February, 1884, after the old bell tower space was rented out for \$12 a month, the big alarm bell announced a blaze at the beloved Opera House. The burning lathe and plaster building represented a place that had garnered many donations through benefit performances for the early fire department.

FUTURE CONSIDERATION

At least 500 spectators watched the big fire. Firemen said their work "was greatly impeded by too many volunteer bosses".

On June 14, 1884, a grand jury in Tucson reviewed the books and noted that the fire department was "badly in need" of

appliances such as a hook and ladder truck. "But as city finances are in such a condition, we can only mention them for future consideration", the jury reported.

About a month later the mayor reported to the council:

"Our water supply for the purpose of extinguishing fires, in my opinion, is not what it should be, and the supply should be increased or the city should purchase a steam fire engine.

"We now have several two-story buildings within the city limits, not one of which can be supplied on its roof with sufficient water to extinguish a fire".

The mayor continued:

"Our fire department is well trained and fairly well equipped and have done some excellent services during the past six months. These men risk their property, their limbs and their lives for the benefit of the city and take their pay in glory, so it seems to me that you can do no less than to supply the necessities they asked for."

The same day the mayor was making the report some fireworks atop the county courthouse caught fire, trapping three men on the roof. While the fire department was quickly putting out the blaze and rescuing the victims a prankster set off a box of rockets in the police chief's office.

In August, 1884, firefighters used real ingenuity in fighting a blaze at a residence at Washington and Main Street. They poked holes in a cistern atop the house and let the water pour down on the flames.

NOBLE AND GALLANT

Dubbed "Noble and Gallant," the first Tucson firefighter reported injured on the job was Tom Hallahan who was overcome by heat and smoke while he fought a blaze at Prince Brothers' carpenter shop.

Members of the hose company stepped up drills to one practice every third night.

All was not work. It was not unusual after a fire for the owner of the burned building to treat the firefighters to food and beverages at the closest establishment.

Several fires started by match-gnawing rats were reported in the following months.

In February, 1885, George Hopkins, a representative of the Harden Hand Grenade Fire Extinguishing Co., visited Tucson to demonstrate his products. Conveniently, there was a tar fire on the day he arrived and Hopkins held a live demonstration.

Near the end of that month the Tucson outfit was honored in the announcement of the Pioneer Hose Company Grand Ball.

The acknowledgement stated:

"The fire laddies are deserving of every favor that can possibly be shown them. They are ready at a moment's notice to answer the firebell's tap and rush heroically to the rescue of property and lives, and that too, at the risk of their own, without possible hope of reward beyond a due acknowledgement of their good deeds by an appreciative public."

From this statement and the mayor's plea to the council, it was apparent there were no salaried firemen in Tucson.

An example of the ongoing fighting within the city was clear in a letter from newly elected Fire Engineer Jack Innes to the City Council. He said recent repairs on fire hydrants were made, but the water company would not allow the fire company to test them because the city refused to pay for the water.

At an annual election in July, 1885, C. F. Brown was named foreman of the hose company.

GENUINE HEROES

In autumn of 1885, the firemen "fought the flames like genuine heroes," according to press reports. The report described a fire at the White House dry goods store. The fire caused about \$20,000 in damage and there was still that ever-present looting.

The report stated:

"The men rushed in and knocked bedsteads and other articles to pieces in their zeal to save something. Some overzealous workers removed a few of the more valuable articles so far away from danger that they have not yet been returned. Hose company arrived promptly."

Historical documents and newspapers did not mention the fire department much again until March, 1886, with a notice stating a permanent hook and ladder company would be formed.

History was sketchy regarding this reorganization, but it was apparent that Joe Encinas had taken Boleyn's position as chief and the fire department had acquired a new, hand-drawn fire engine. The new department had 45 volunteers.

According to some reports, Ygnacio Calvillo organized the original hose company. Many of the hose company volunteers were of Mexican descent.

During its first meeting in 1887, the city council unanimously decided to purchase a new fire truck.

Meanwhile, steam pumps in the Southern Pacific railroad yards were used when fires started in areas close enough to reach.

One report stated that Boleyn showed off his "big truck, hose cart and ladder wagon" in a drill fire in May, 1887.

EARTHQUAKE

During the same month, the fire department reported the only Tucson earthquake in recent history. It lasted "only a few moments," but damage was "considerable."

Meanwhile, the rats were still gnawing on matchsticks. This time it was at the Grand Central Saloon.

In 1888, Boleyn was still leading the Tucson Fire Department while Calvillo maintained his position in the hose company. The names of Charles Sherwood and William Baldwin were connected with leadership of the hook and ladder company.

The first reported school fire drill was November 15, 1888. Firemen watched as about 400 students were evacuated in 45 seconds.

At this point, the firefighters of Tucson were referred to as hook and ladder boys, the hose company, the fire company and the Tucson Fire Department.

In July of 1891 the city was divided into five wards. A bell code was given to each ward so a volunteer listening to the alarm could get a good idea of the vicinity of a blaze. The alarm was a continuous, rapid ringing of the City Hall bell, ending with one, two, three, four or five slow taps to indicate the number of the ward.

"CHICKENLESS COOP FIRE"

It was apparent from reports in the Star that during this period it was no easy matter to stir excitement in the city of Tucson. But when the fire bell rang, residents and volunteers hurried to the scene. An example of this enthusiasm was noted in a report on a March, 1894, blaze at Dr. Mata's building on Pennington Street. The report said the fire in a "chickenless coop" was under control before firefighters arrived, and "Harry Drachman and three sturdy youths were the first to get the hose cart."

News reports from a March, 1894, council meeting showed the firefighters continuing the omnipresent battles with city hall.

A city committee studied the minutes of the fire committee meetings that recorded the arguments. A city committee was named to study the problem. The Star said:

"The fire laddies are in hot water all the time and it looks

as if nothing can be done to adjust matters. The council members have about come to the conclusion that it is a hopeless case."

The fire calls during that March were not without a little humor. One report read:

LANGUAGE THAT WOULD FADE FLOWERS

"Corral of M. Samaniego in Gay Alley noon yesterday dropped cigarette in hay. At the entrance of the corral was a big vicious cream-headed dog...An inquisitive person started to enter the corral. He went out at the gate much more rapidly than he entered, while the aforesaid dog stood peacefully chewing on the seat of (the man's) trousers. The (man) indulged in language that fade the flowers that bloom in the springtime."

In August, 1895, one of those old Babcock fire extinguishers appeared for the first time in many years on the news pages:

"Charles Brown overhauled one of the old Babcock fire extinguishers yesterday and recharged it with fluid. As the fluid had been about the engine for more than a decade of years Mr. Brown has some doubts as to its strength, so he built a fire and tested the apparatus. He found it in first class working order and now the extinguisher is ready to use on the next fire."

In the fall of 1896 Tucson purchased a new chemical engine for \$1,700.

Boleyn finished his stint as the first Tucson fire chief in 1898. Frank Russell, who would hold the position until 1903, was the new fire department leader.

In September of the same year, plans were formed to set up a hydrant system with six-inch inlets with two 2½-inch nozzles and 14-inch streamer nozzles. The Tucsonans were planning for the future for a time when buildings would be higher and a steam fire engine would be necessary. With this order of nozzles, no changes would be needed to adapt to the future equipment.

DISBANDED AGAIN

In September of 1898, the fire department was once again reported disbanded. The reorganization was again necessary because membership fell below its minimum numbers. Councilmen decided the chemical engine and the hook and ladder would be managed by a single fire company of volunteers.

H. E. Sheldon was named temporary chief.

Councilmen offered an interesting incentive to volunteers. During the September meeting, a resolution was adopted to give \$2.50 to the first team to arrive at the engine hall after the alarm rang. The team also had responsibility for pulling the equipment to the fire and returning it to the hall. The city agreed to pay \$1.50 in cases of a false alarm.

"BEST EQUIPMENT POSSIBLE"

The council resolved, "It is the purpose of the council to have the best fire equipment possible under existing circumstances."

In June, 1899, Chief Frank E. Russell listened to a sales pitch on a better alarm system. The original telephone box alarm system was called "antiquated".

Another reorganization came in October, 1899. Under the new organization, charter volunteers were exempt from poll and property taxes up to \$1,000.

In/^{the}decade's final days, a special meeting was held to form a relief association. The idea was popular. Firemen reported \$400 in the treasury, and the men decided to hold a smoker to attract new members.

The turn of the century brought two marked changes to the Tucson Fire Department. The first salaried firefighter was Frank C. Norton. His pay was about \$10 per month.

HORSES AND HARNESSES

The department, under Chief Russell purchased four horses and a Hale Patent harness in August, 1900. Previously all carts were pulled by hand. Two horses pulled the chemical engine, and two pulled the hook and ladder. The hose cart was attached to the chemical engine.

Funds for the horses were raised through donations and special benefit programs at the Opera House. Other funds were collected from owners of property saved by the firefighters. Owners did not have to pay if their buildings burned to the ground.

Alex McNeil was the second salaried fireman. According to the records, he worked a 21-hour day, 365 days a year. McNeil had one hour off for each meal. He had to pay substitutes out of pocket.

A fire at the Corner Saloon in May, 1903, may have had bizarre effects. The damage reported was a small Anheiser brew wagon sign and one bottle of Italian vermouth. The fire department during this era was credited with extremely fast attention to calls. The saloon fire was an example of the rapid reaction.

In 1904, Henry Melliush was fire chief until he was replaced a year later by George Scholfield.

CHAMPS

During the department's early days, the big claim to fame was the defeat in 1906 of the Bisbee hose laying team in the state championships. The Tucson team pulled the hose cart 150 feet, attached it to a fire plug and played out 100 feet of hose in 28 seconds.

In 1906, the department purchased a \$1,700 chemical engine. All prices were rising during this time and the price of beer doubled to 10 cents.

Chief Scholfield made some more important improvements in 1906. He said the paid men at the station would keep a record book on all fires.

He also petitioned for a new alarm system. His petition is of great value because it described a typical fire call of the time.

The petition read:

"The Tucson Fire Department responds as quickly as any in Arizona or New Mexico. As soon as the alarm reaches the engine house it starts a buzzer going, the horses are released from their stalls, they run to their places, the harnesses drop and the fire department is on its way."

"The great trouble, however, is with the method of call up the fire engine house and notifying them of a fire. It very often happens that there is no telephone in the house in which a fire starts. It is necessary then to run out and find a phone before the alarm can be given. It would be even worse if a fire were to break out late at night when everyone has retired. Should a passerby discover the fire he would be unable to give an alarm until he finally came to a house where there is a telephone."

RED AND GOLD TANK

In 1907, the city water supply included a bright red and gold fire water tank located at Fourth Avenue and 16th Street.

In 1908, there was a bond issue passed to move the old fire bell to a proposed brick station on South Sixth Avenue.

In 1909, the department had nine horses, sporting names like Ted, Buck, Glen, Babe, Hero and Prince. The department moved June 21, 1909, to the new Sixth Avenue fire house.

That same year, when Sam Barkley took over as chief, fire-fighting equipment was valued at more than \$50,000. There were five paid employees.

In 1910, the department's seven paid men started getting time off--12 hours every seventh day. In the same year, the department saw its first paid chief, John Conlin.

The most spectacular fire of 1910 was at the Southern Pacific railroad shops. A blaze starting in the shops destroyed the old frame roundhouse, 10 railroad engines and 19 tinders.

In 1911, Frank Ganz was named chief. He held the job for five years.

February 14, 1912, the fire bells rang out the announcement that Arizona had become a state.

In 1913, the department finally became mechanized with the purchase of a four-cylinder, hand-cranked Velie, combination chemical engine and hose truck.

With the success of the fully paid city operation, the volunteers disbanded in 1915.

NEW EQUIPMENT

The department purchased two, six-cylinder, self-starting, triple combination 900-gallon centrifugal Seagrave Motor trucks. A new fire station was built on North Fourth Avenue and five more men were added to the department. The purchase of the new trucks ended the era of horse-drawn fire equipment in Tucson.

During this time the firemen received about \$10 per month salary.

Separation to day and night shifts came in 1920 with the addition of another seven firemen.

By 1923, when Tucson had reached a population of 29,000, two six-cylinder, self-starting, triple combination rotary pumpers and one 75-foot aerial ladder truck were purchased along with 60 new Gamewell alarm boxes.

The department definitely was on the move. All improvements were results of bond issues.

A new fire station was built at Park Avenue and Ninth Street.

In the late 1920's, bond issues brought in money for a piston pump, more alarm boxes and paid for the remodeling of the Sixth Avenue central headquarters. Fire alarm headquarters moved to Rincon Park. In 1930, the department added a fire station at West Alameda and Grande Avenue. An American LeFrance 750 gallon-per-minute quad truck went into service.

Now, there were 34 firefighters in the department.

In that same year, vocational classes started for firemen.

A mark of the era that was now gone, most of the fire horses started dying off in the early 1930's.

Another sure sign that the old was gone was the removal of that original, controversial fire bell.

FIREMEN HELP POLICE

On January 23, 1934, fire struck the Congress Hotel, resulting in not only big fire stories but police news as well.

Tucson firemen William Benedict and Robert Freeman were helping move people out of the burning hotel. They noticed the luggage of three women and four men routed from the hotel was extremely heavy. The bags contained machine guns, bulletproof vests and a variety of smaller weapons. The firemen said they recognized the faces of the guests from the pictures in a detective magazine. They told police two days later, John Dillinger and a fellow gang member were arrested at a house on North Second Avenue.

The newspaper lauded the hotel clerk, Helga Nelson, who stayed at the switchboard during the blaze, warning guests to get out of the rooms. An Arizona Daily Star headline read, "TELEPHONE GIRL HOLDS POST AS CONGRESS BURNS."

The next big fire caused \$150,000 damage to Christmas stock November 13, 1941, at the Woolworth Building. More than a dozen water lines flushed the building while the aerial ladder took lines to the roof before it collapsed.

More than 1,000 office workers watched the blaze.

In 1942, Tucson named its first fire inspector. The first fire captain was assigned to duty. Every three months, the captains were assigned to a different area so they would know each building in the city. Another pumper was added to the Park Avenue station.

FIRST TRAINING PROGRAM

Drill Master H. E. "Chili" Francis was appointed in July of 1946 to supervise the department's first training program. The program progressed after that under Captain John Steger and Captain L. F. Peterson.

The force increased to 48 men in 1947 when they covered a city with a population of 57,390.

Howard Danielson was detached from the firefighting force and assigned to form a Fire Prevention Bureau in December, 1946.

Under the direction of Peterson, three-way communication was added and all vehicles were equipped with radios in 1949. During the same year, a 1,000-gallon-per-minute centrifugal pumper was added and the 1923 pumpers were placed in storage. The 1928 models were moved to reserve duty.

A year later, the department retired the old aerial ladder truck and replaced it with an 85-foot ladder vehicle. More men were added to the roster, bringing the total in 1950 to 65 firefighters.

The first rescue unit was delivered in June, 1951. It was donated by the Oil Information Commission and the Tucson Auto and Cycle Racing Association.

The vehicle was described as a first-class rescue unit. All members of the department were qualified as advanced first aid personnel through a continuous study program.

In September of 1952, the fire department employed a total of 74 fireman.

BIG PUMPER

In the department's greatest expansion move since the 1930's, a new 1,000-gallon pumper was purchased in 1953, and Fire Station No. 5, located at Grant Road and Vine Avenue was built to handle two fire companies in preparation for future population

growth in the area. The roster moved to 85.

In the first month of 1954, the department had six pumpers in service with two in reserve. The Tucson Fire Department had five fire stations, six engine companies and one ladder company.

The adoption of Fire Prevention Ordinance No. 1524 by the city in 1954 assisted the Fire Prevention Division.

The Fire Department shared radio frequencies with the police department until November, 1955, when the fire unit was assigned its own spot.

In January, 1956, eight men were added to the temporary station at North Swan Road and East Fifth Street. Another eight were added at a temporary station at the Downtown Airport on East 36th street.

In mid-1956, the members of the Tucson Fire Department began the routine daily testing and inspection of fire alarm systems. They also made checks on the city's 86 fire alarm boxes.

During the same period, the department took on the largest single task of the time-- inspecting family dwellings.

GROWING CITY

Large scale changes hit the department in the late 1950's, when the city annexed 21.3 square miles. The city limits were extended north to Roger Road and east to Kolb Road. The expansion demanded more firemen, more equipment and more temporary fire stations. Stations were opened at 5941 East 22nd Street and 3325 North Stone Avenue. About 20 additional men were hired to man stations.

In the early 1960's, the city obtained two, 1250 Seagrave pumpers and two 100-foot aerial ladder trucks.

On March 18, 1960, the city annexed another 25 square miles on the northwest, west and south sides of the growing Tucson.

Station No. 12, formerly Catalina Fire Department, had been activated. Station No. 6 was moved from its temporary location on Swan Road to permanent facilities at North Venice and East Bellevue. A new station at East First Street and Anderson Avenue was activated to serve Tucson. In early 1960, the Southside Fire District went into service. Next, the station at 4075 East Timrod Street opened for duty.

In January, 1963, the National Board of Fire Underwriters published a bulletin setting new standards regarding the distribution of engine companies and responses to alarms. This enabled the Tucson Fire Department to evaluate its station locations, and on May 17, Stations No. 2 and 15 were deactivated.

The fire department got the word of a fire in a strange way in one case in 1963. An announcer at a local radio station told his listeners to call the fire department, his studio was ablaze.

The year 1963 saw one of Tucson's roughest fires. An explosion and fire at Supreme Cleaners on North Stone Avenue left seven dead and 35 injured.

In 1964, the City's per capita fire loss was \$1.93 while the number of rescue calls went up to more than 1,400. Fire inspectors checked some 55,000 homes during this year. Fire prevention personnel inspected more than 6,600 buildings. About the same time, Station No. 10 at Ajo Way near Park Avenue was activated.

A sad historical event occurred in 1965 when a fire was discovered at a house on North Court Avenue. "Chili" Francis, the former drill master, was found dead in the house.

In 1965, Chief John H. Freeman retired after 40 years of service to the fire department.

L. F. Peterson was appointed fire chief. The station on Pantano Road south of Broadway opened that year.

In 1966, the first diesel-powered pumper was delivered and a fourth rescue unit was placed in service.

Firefighters were kept busy with about a half dozen Molotov cocktail blazes in the late 1960s.

DISASTER STRIKES

One big disaster occurred in 1967 when an East Pima Street nursing home caught fire. Firemen quelled the blaze in minutes, but four persons died in the excitement and smoke. Nearly all ambulances in town--including military vehicles--responded.

In 1968, after the opening of new stations at King Road and at South Liberty Avenue, the department had 12 stations.

Just before Christmas in 1967, a Davis-Monthan fighter took off, loaded with 17,000 pounds of jet fuel. It crashed into a busy Christmas crowd at an Alvernon shopping center. Only three lives were lost in what could have been the City's greatest catastrophe.

The Department's training center at Ajo Way and Park Avenue in 1969 went into full operation as the Training Center for the Southwest.

On August 25, 1970 construction began on the Fire-Police complex at Church Avenue and McCormick Street.

Another big blaze, most recent firemen remember, was at the Pacific Fruit Express Company Ice House. Several firemen were injured in the blaze.

The worst fire in terms of human life loss roared through parts of the Pioneer Hotel during Christmas week in 1970. An Associated Press article called it a holocaust.

Twenty-eight persons died in the blaze and another 13 were treated at Tucson hospitals. Nearly 35 firemen were injured fighting the mighty blaze. Many guests panicked and leaped from the building. An example of a fireman's bravery included Public Information Officer Franklin who jumped into action. His leg became tangled in a ladder and he received severe injuries in his attempts to help.

INSERT EDITORIAL
HERE.

The Phoenix Gazette

Eugene C. Pulliam, Publisher

"Where The Spirit Of The Lord Is, There Is Liberty"

II Corinthians 3:17

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1970

Tucson's Heroes

Tucson is recovering from the shock of the Pioneer International Hotel holocaust, one of the worst tragedies in Arizona history. Twenty-eight persons died, and 44 were injured; the holiday spirit has been dampened in the Old Pueblo. In the aftermath of tragedy Tucsonans should consider the manner of men who answered the alarm at the Pioneer — not only firefighters but law officers, too.

The news report reads: "The heat was so intense that it popped out the concrete facing in the stairwells and melted the glass in lights, which, firemen said, takes a temperature of 1,550 degrees." In this inferno there were helpless human beings — many of them children and oldsters. It was into this merciless inferno that Tucson's firemen plunged while firemen outside the hotel worked to rescue people whose only chance to live was to escape through windows. There were too many people trapped, too fast a fire, too little time to do the job. But rescue efforts were superhuman.

One off-duty fire captain, dressed in a business suit, scrambled up a ladder to take a woman

down from a ledge. He himself was trapped when an extension ladder collapsed and pinned his foot. Fireman Pete Trujillo is hospitalized with a broken back and broken legs suffered when he fell from that ladder. Firemen collapsed from smoke inhalation, and one was radioing information on the possible cause of the blaze when he fell.

It is not easy to describe any tragedy. There are flames and heat, the screams of the living and dying, the sight of charred and broken bodies and the vacant look of the survivors. It is not easy to describe tragedy's hero; he's the same fellow who got a cat down from a tree last week and helped put out a trash bin fire.

The fact that 84 guests survived the hotel fire is a testimonial to the training, the spirit and the sheer guts of the Tucson Fire Department and to the city's law enforcement officers who responded. Every man did his job and more, and many risked their own lives. There is a sadness in Tucson, but there should be a pride for the manner of men there.

THE BIG MOVE

On June 1, 1972, firemen moved--after 63 years at Old Central--to department offices at 265 South Church Avenue.

Over the years, the department had grown to 333 firefighters and 12 stations. In August, 1972, a 150-foot lift platform was added to service. At the time it was the only one in the United States.

A WEASEL?

An incident in 1973 did not involve a cat trapped in a house. It was a weasel.

Captain Fred Rhyner burst into a residence to rescue the weasel. The weasel showed his thanks by taking a chunk out of the captain's leg.

In July, 1976 Chief L. F. Peterson retired after 36 years of service to the department. W. D. Dearing served as acting chief from August 1, 1976 through October 31, 1976 when E. Dean Holland was appointed to the top position.

One of the last major City firefighting efforts in Tucson during the past decade was the crash of the A7-D fighter near the University of Arizona. The fire was quickly controlled.

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS

It is easy to see from history that the Tucson Fire Department has seen a century of progress.

Through the 10 decades, the department ecked its way from a couple of dozen hardy volunteers with picks, shovels and buckets to an award-winning force of 411 proud employees.

Greater Tucson Fire Foundation

Thanks you for taking an interest in Tucson Fire Department history —

This is one of many sections that contain information, documents, letters, newspaper articles, pictures, etc. They have been collected and arranged in chronological order or by a subject. These items were collected, organized and entered into a computerized database by Dave Ridings Assistant Chief Tucson Fire Department, Al Ring friend of the department, Greater Tucson Fire Foundation and with the help of many friends and fellow firefighters.

All graphics have been improved to make the resolution as good as possible, but the reader should remember that many came from copies of old newspaper articles. This also applies to other items such as documents, letters, etc.

Credit to the source of the documents, photos, etc. is provided whenever it was available. We realize that many items are not identified and regret that we weren't able to provide this information. As far as the newspaper articles that are not identified, 99% of them would have to be from one of three possible sources. The *Arizona Daily Star*, The *Tucson Citizen* and the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, for which we want to give a special thanks.

Please use this information as a reference tool only. If the reader uses any of the information for any purpose other than a reference tool, they should get permission from the source.

Should the reader have additional information on the above subject we would appreciate you sharing it with us. Please see the names and contact information on the 1st. TFD Archives page right below this paragraph.

