

News & Observer Notes – Ambulance Services in Raleigh

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1962, May 3 – News & Observer profile of Raleigh Emergency Rescue Squad. They answer a hundred or more calls a year. Two firemen are assigned to the squad, each working a twelve-hour shift. Twelve other members are firemen who serve in off hours. Total volunteers number 25 to 30, and include railroad dispatchers, bus drivers, insurance men, and store clerks. They have two trucks, a panel van that can transport, and a Civil Defense rescue truck. They answer all types of technical rescue calls, as well as first aid calls. They transport when ambulances are unavailable. They also answer “standby calls,” such as at fires and bomb scares. (N&O, 5/23/62)

1965, March 16 – State and local governments should be authorized to help provide supervised ambulance service in North Carolina, says a report by the North Carolina Hospital Education and Research Foundation Inc., in cooperation with the Institute of Government and the UNC School of Medicine. The report says that, in general, ambulance service should be provided by private enterprise. Currently, it’s an “unorganized combination of private business, particularly funeral homes, volunteer groups and, in a few instances, local governments.”

Report also notes that funeral homes have ceased ambulance operations in at least ten counties. They recommend that a local government agency should pay for those citizens unable to afford ambulance service. And that a good first step would be for the General Assembly to empower the State Board of Health to manage ambulance services, including setting standards and issuing permits. Legislators should also authorize local governments to grant franchises, regulate charges, and perform other aspects of governance of ambulance services. (N&O, 3/16/65)

1965, March 21 – Some study citations: one in every three state ambulance operators doesn’t render first aid at the scene of an emergency. More than 300 residents in the state need ambulance service each day. Four out of five ambulances in the state are operated by funeral homes. And at least one third of those funeral homes has thought about ceasing ambulance services, due to financial reasons. The final report is the result of the aforementioned two-year study. The principal investigator for the study is Dr. Robert A. Cadmus. (N&O, 3/21/65)

1965, October – Nearly all funeral homes in Raleigh cease operations. Six out of seven cease operations.¹ Only Overby Funeral Home remains active. The owners contended that “deficit operations were no longer worth the advertising and good will that furnishing ambulance service brought. The number of unpaid bills was increasing, and falls calls were coming more and more numerous. It was inconvenient to maintain personnel on duty 24 hours a day. Competition was also not proving to be healthy.” Funeral homes outside of Raleigh continue operating ambulance services, however. **Raleigh Ambulance Service**

¹ From 1965 Raleigh phone book listings, the six funeral homes that ceased service were likely Brown-Wynne FH, Capitol FH, Lightner FH, Mitchell FH, Pennington-Smith FH, and Raleigh FH.

is established and handles most of the city's ambulance business, with only Overby as its competitor. It begins service on November 1, 1965. Sources: N&O, 2/26/66, 3/24/66, 11/8/66, 11/20/66.

1965 – Statewide ambulance bill introduced in waning hours of 1965 General Assembly session. Fails to win legislature's approval. Only Cumberland County get special legislation that permits officials to regular ambulance service. (N&O, 2/3/67)

1966, February 26 – Raleigh's new ambulance service, Raleigh Ambulance Service operated by Gene Clark, requests city and county subsidies for patients who can't or won't pay for transport. He has communicated his request in a letter to County Manager Garland Jones. He notes that only subsidies will negate the need for an increase in his service fee, currently \$15 per trip. And a new city ordinance, which makes it a misdemeanor to not pay [ambulance] service charges, isn't helping. The first case brought to city court was dismissed.

After March 8, he adds, he will ask both county commissioners and City Council to "establish minimum standards for the personnel and equipment of ambulance operations in the county." (N&O)

1966, March 24 – Raleigh Ambulance Service operator Gene Clark says he'll stop answer police and indigent patient calls effective on midnight, April 20, unless the city and county provide his company with financial assistance. He has operated four ambulances since last October. The only other service is Overby's Funeral Home, which operates two ambulances.

Clark has asked the city "to require that all ambulance firms, even if they don't have their offices in Raleigh, to be required to have a privilege license to operate here." One firm from outside the city, he notes, "made eleven trips to a local convalescent home during February." The firm charges \$2.50 per trip, and Clark can't compete with those prices.

He's asked the city to subsidize, at least partially, "police and indigent calls." He wants the county to assure payment for ambulance service for people on welfare rolls. The county currently pays, if the trip for a welfare recipient is ordered by the welfare department. But "it's not possible to clear welfare calls with the welfare department in emergency situations."

Through February, notes Clark, he's had an 8.4 percent collection rate on "police calls and indigent patient service." That amounts to \$8,060 of uncollected money, during the four months he's been in operation. (N&O)

1966, April 5 – County commissions tell Clark that they'll take his request under consideration. The News & Observer reports that his plea "drew a cool reception" at the Monday meeting. (N&O)

1966, April 6 – City Manager W. H. Carper says "the matter overlaps city limits and can best be handled by the county." Clark states that he'll stop answering police calls after April 30, unless he receives some financial help. He plans to stop operating two of his four ambulances. He says his uncollected monies total several thousand dollars. He also sought a meeting with City Council on the matter, but they've declined his request. (N&O)

1966, April 9 – Clark states that his April 30 cut-off date could be extended, if city and county officials make an "honest effort" to help him collect "unpaid ambulance bills." He has also asked the city to

strengthen the ordinance, which makes it a misdemeanor to not pay an ambulance bill. He also wants the city to “set minimum standards for ambulances and ambulance personnel operating within Raleigh.” (N&O)

1966, April 19 – City Council agrees Monday [April 18] to adopt an ordinance regulating ambulance service in Raleigh. As a result, Raleigh Ambulance Service owner Gene Clark grants a ten-day extension of his April 30 deadline for answering police calls.

The council has sent to the Law and Finance Committee a nine-page ordinance proposal, drafted by city attorneys, which “outlines standards for equipment, personnel, and service obligations.” If adopted, “all ambulance services in Raleigh must be licensed by the city, must meeting the minimum standards, and answer all calls around the clock.” The ordinance would also set the fee amounts for the various types of ambulance services, including \$15 per person for the first ten miles of a trip, plus 65 cents for each mile farther.

The ordinance is approved by Clark, the council members, and administrators of Rex and Wake hospitals. Joseph R. Overby, operator of Overby Funeral Home and the other ambulance provider in Raleigh, does not approve. (N&O)

1966, April 22 – County Manager Garland Jones said he thinks a plan can be worked out, for the county to underwrite ambulance service costs for people on welfare. (N&O)

1966, April 29 – The Law and Finance Committee of city council will begin point-by-point arbitration, to resolve differences in proposed regulations and standards for ambulance service in the city. Gene Clark wants tight regulations. Joseph R. Overby wants looser restrictions. Local medical officials “want to assure high standards of medical service in the operation of ambulances.” (N&O)

1966, May 6 – Woman waits twenty-one minutes for ambulance, at car accident on Downtown Boulevard. The police dispatcher contacted Raleigh Ambulance. Twelve minutes later, the service called back and said an ambulance wasn’t available. Police then called Overby Funeral Home and the Raleigh Rescue Squad. The latter arrived first, and took the woman to the hospital. (N&O)

1966, May 7 – Gene Clark says his company didn’t have any ambulances available, at the accident the day before. Only two were on duty, and one was standing by at the State Fairgrounds, where “the Lion’s Club Stampede and Rodeo” was taking place. The other unit was transporting a patient from Wake Memorial Hospital to Duke Hospital, for surgery. (N&O)

1966, June 3 – Fifty-one funeral directors in nine Piedmont North Carolina counties have contacted city and county governments, advising that they intend to cease ambulance service September 30. The counties of Alamance, Caswell, Chatham, Guilford, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, and the city of Thomasville in Davidson County. They did state, however, that they would take care of emergency needs, until “other provisions for ambulance services were made.” (N&O)

1966, July 19 – Raleigh Ambulance Service is granted the first city license for ambulance operation, pending “legal clearance of his application” and an inspection of his equipment. The ordinance was adopted in May. Both Clark and Overby’s ambulance firms were given ninety days to comply. Overby requested that the requirement be dropped that each emergency vehicle be equipped with a two-way

radio. He was fine at first, since participation in Medicare also requires radios. But since the Medicare provisions are “silent about radio equipment” and each radio costs \$2,850 per vehicle, he thinks the requirement should be dropped. If it’s kept, he has requested a sixty day extension to meet it. (N&O)

1966, August 2 – Overby gets fifteen more days to bring his ambulance service up to standards set in the city ordinance. He currently has one ambulance operated by his funeral home. (N&O)

1966, August 16 – Overby is awarded a license. (N&O)

1966, November 8 – Raleigh Ambulance Service is now named Ambulance Service of Raleigh Inc. The operator is still Gene Clark. He has against requested a subsidy from Wake County. He has reported lost \$12,000 since starting his business a year ago. His attorney, Charles E. Clement, tells the county that Clark is “seriously considering going out of business.” The county attorney, however, questions if the county is authorized to contribute funds to the ambulance service, since the State attorney general’s office has ruled that the county shouldn’t make such payments to such services. (N&O)

1966, November 20 – Wake County four representatives to the General Assembly support a bill to “authorize counties and towns to regulate ambulance services, grant franchises, set rates, determine the maximum number of ambulances, and set liability insurance rate minimums.” Such a bill, which exists in Cumberland County, was introduced in the 1965 session, but failed to pass.

In Raleigh, Ambulance Service of Raleigh Inc. and Overby Funeral Home are providing ambulance service. In Wake County, funeral homes in Apex, Fuquay-Varina, Wake Forest, Wendell, and Zebulon are still providing ambulance service. (N&O)

1966, November 22 – Fuquay-Varina native Lennie L. Whittington Jr. applies to the city for a license to operate a three-vehicle ambulance service. He currently operates a service in Los Angeles. He’s operated ambulance services in California for ten years. Meanwhile, Gene Clark is still appealing to both the city and county for a financial subsidy. He says he’s losing about \$1,200 a month. (N&O)

1966, November 28 – Whittington’s application is rejected. The city attorney is quoted as saying they “received a report from the FBI and it looked pretty bad.” (N&O)

1967, January 4 – Gene Clark has appealed again to city council for financial aid. He wants to raise his emergency call rates from \$15 to \$20 per call. He has also recently asked for an amendment to the city ordinance that requires the ambulance service to answer all emergency calls. He’s also asked the city to consider dividing Raleigh into ambulance zones, so the closest service (Ambulance Service of Raleigh or Overby’s Funeral Home) is dispatched. Also, the county commissions have adopted a resolution recommending that both Rex and Wake hospitals be asked to help the ambulance service, by including ambulance charges in bills to payment. (N&O, 1/4/67)

1967, January 10 – Gene Clark’s attorney has told the city and county that Ambulance Service of Raleigh may go out of business, unless he can get financial aid from the local government. Both city and county express that they don’t have the authority to provide same. (N&O, 1/10/67) He claims he’s lost more than \$10,000 in fifteen months of operation. (N&O, 2/3/67)

1967, February ___ - City council approvals rate increase for local ambulance services, from \$15 to \$20 per trip. Gene Clark has since dropped his request for ambulance districts, and an amendment to the city ordinance about answering emergency calls. (N&O, 2/?/67)

1967, April 4 – City council informed on Monday before April 4 that Ambulance Service of Raleigh Inc. is merging with Ambulance Service Inc. of Rockingham County. The council is told that ASR “terminated its business Friday of last week” because “the company could not make a go of it financially.” The ambulance service continues to operate. (N&O, 4/4/67)

May 6, 1967 – Legislation authorizing counties to “assure adequate and continuing ambulance service” is placed into the law on the Friday before May 6. The bill grants counties power to “grant franchises, subsidize private companies, or set up public operations to ensure that ambulance service continues.” Counties have the power to levy taxes without vote, if money is needed to finance such services. A grandfather clause provides that a county can grant a franchise to any private firm presently offering service, if it meets the “specifications of the law.” The bill “sets up various requirements of personnel and equipment for ambulances licensed under the law.” (N&O, 5/6/67)

1967, June 6 – Ambulance Service of Raleigh, now owned by another firm, has appealed to county commissioners for financial aid. (N&O, 6/6/67) They have three ambulances. (N&O 6/9/67)

1967, June 9 – City and council officials disagree on who should provide emergency ambulance service. (N&O, 6/9/67)

1967, June 21 – Ambulance Service Inc., which is keeping the ambulances of the former Ambulance Services of Raleigh running, again informs county officials that it will go out of business if it doesn’t get financial help. Gene Clark is the company’s largest stakeholder. The ambulance service doesn’t propose to cover any towns outside of the Raleigh metropolitan area. It would require three ambulances and fourteen men to handle the average of six daily calls they anticipate. “This would cost \$86,327” with gross possible income of “\$54,750.” And which would be cut to \$35,000, “figuring that only sixty-five percent of bills are collectible. This amounts to losing \$57,784 a year.” (N&O, 6/21/67)

1967, July 11 – City court judge offers opinion that Raleigh’s ambulance ordinance, requiring payment for services, may not be constitutional. Last week, several people were brought to court on warrants signed by officials of “Raleigh Ambulance Service.” (NO, 7/11/67)

1967, July 22 – County officials have been told that Ambulance Service Inc. will stop answer calls outside the city limits as of August 21 if they don’t get a \$35,000 annual subsidy. They’ll continue to answer convalescent calls to those in need, and will then request Raleigh amend their ordinance requiring them to answer all emergency calls in the city. If all requests are met, the company will have to cease operations in Wake County. (N&O, 7/22/67, 8/8/67)

1967, August 8 – County Commissioner has delivered a “long-awaited report from the commissioner’s ambulance committee.” It does not recommend a subsidy, but instead recommends that the county pay only for welfare patient calls, calls from the Sheriff’s department that result in unpaid bills, and that they “encourage and make provision” for hospitals to include ambulance fees in their bills. The report also notes that nine funeral homes in the county are operating fifteen ambulances. It is anticipated that all will

cease ambulance operations by October 1, which is when minimal wage laws will be enforced for ambulance workers, and certification for them will be required by the state. (N&O, 8/8/67)

1967, August 10 – Ambulance districts are against suggested to city council from the attorney for Ambulance Service of Raleigh. Currently, the two ambulance services alternate between emergency calls regardless of location. ASR is located at 500 Pershing Road, Overby's is located at 2415 Highway 70. (N&O, 8/10/67)

1967, August 23 – City council has told both ambulance companies to submit a joint request to city council on September 5, regarding the proposal to create ambulance districts. Also, the Ambulance Service of Raleigh has discontinued service as of midnight Monday, for emergency services for county residents outside the city, because county commissioners have refused to subsidize the company. County officials have arranged for temporary service from Wake Memorial Hospital, Overby Funeral Home, and three rescue squads. (N&O, 8/23/67)

1967, September 6 – City Council calls for a joint meeting with the county commissioners, to iron out the controversial ambulance situation. They also told the city's two ambulance services to "abide by their franchises or go out of business." Those agreements require that ASR and OFH answer emergency calls. Ambulance Service of Raleigh halted county emergency calls on August 21, and has threatened to halt city emergency calls on September 18. (N&O, 9/6/67)

1967, September 10 – City Manager says he can't guarantee ambulance service throughout the city, if ASR halts operations on September 18. He says that ambulance service for patients on the "public ways" can be maintained, but not for person in "private circumstances." City might call upon three sources for help: rescue squads, station wagons pressed into service and operated by police, and hospitals, which could be asked to go back into ambulance business. (N&O, 9/10/67)

1967, September 19 – City council suspends for 90 days the city ordinance requirement that ambulance companies answer all emergency calls. During this time, the city will use rescue squad vehicles to answer ambulance calls in public places. They'll charge \$17.50 per trip. This applies only to the city, and only in public areas. Ambulance service in non-public areas is still the ambulance company's responsibility. (N&O, 9/19/67)

1967, September 29 – County officials plan to rewrite the Wake Memorial Hospital charter, to authorize temporary ambulance service. Hospital officials told the city and county Monday that they couldn't help in the ambulance crisis, because their charter doesn't include provisions for such service. The hospital has two station wagons, but won't permit their use as ambulances. Meanwhile, a county ambulance committee is studying several alternatives to subsidizing Ambulance Service of Raleigh, which stopped emergency service outside of Raleigh on August 21. (N&O, 9/29/67)

1967, October 3 – County commissioners agree Monday to enter into a contract with a private ambulance firm, to provide service to those areas of the county without it. Specific details had not been determined. (N&O, 10/3/67)

1967, October 13 – Licensing regulation for operators of ambulances are adopted by the state board of Health on Thursday. The rules include a thirty-one point list of equipment features that ambulances must

contain. There's also a fourteen-point list of sanitary standards. Permits to operate ambulances must be obtained on an annual basis. (N&O, 10/13/67)

1967, October 25 – County officials ask three ambulance services, in Raleigh, Durham, and Charlotte, if they'd be interested in serving the county on a contract basis, and for estimates if yes. Each is requested to reply by October 31. Proposals are requested in three-parts: to service Raleigh and periphery only, county-wide service, and service Raleigh and periphery, with provision for any other area of the county that doesn't have service.

Meanwhile, Wake Memorial Hospital is starting a temporary plan to use hospital vehicles for ambulances. One funeral home in Raleigh is providing service in Raleigh. (N&O, 10/25/67) They changed their charter to allow such service. (N&O, 11/1/67)

1967, November 1 – James W. Huffstetler, ambulance driver for the Ambulance Service of Raleigh, notifies the county that he's planning to form a company that would also be interested in the contract. He's made arrangements to get three ambulances and six men, if awarded the contract. (N&O, 11/1/67)

1968, January 8 – County commissioners offer Monday to give funeral homes \$1000 a year as a subsidy, if they continue to answer emergency ambulance calls. There are ten funeral homes (and seven funeral home operators) providing such services outside Raleigh. They include:

- Albright Funeral Home, Apex.
- Bright Funeral Home, Wake Forest.
- Lewis Funeral Home, Wendell.
- Screws and Hudson Funeral Home, Zebulon.
- Sugg Funeral Home, Fuquay-Varina. (N&O, 1/9/68)

1968, March 5 – County commissions approve a committee's recommendation to award a contract to Ambulance Service of Raleigh for \$31,780 annual, to cover Raleigh and surrounding area within five miles of the city. ASR's bid was \$16,000 lower than the next lowest bid, from Ambulance Service Inc. of Durham. Five firms placed bids. They also approved the committee's recommendations to subsidize the funeral homes in rural areas with \$1,500 per year, if they are certified by the state to provide ambulance service. (N&O, 3/5/68)

1968, April 5 – Wake County commissions formally award a contract to the Ambulance Service of Raleigh Inc, for service in Raleigh and county areas where funeral home ambulance service isn't available. The contract will expire June 30, at which time it must be renegotiated. For ninety days, they'll pay a prorated portion of the \$31,780 annual figure. The contract states that the service will answer all calls from the police, sheriff, highway patrol, and all other emergency calls. The company will charge \$20 for service within Raleigh, and add 65 cents per mile one way if the ambulance goes outside the city limits. The company cannot charge the county welfare department for service, except when transferring a welfare patient from one facility to another.

County officials are also planning to subsidize funeral homes in Apex, Cary, Fuquay-Varina, Wake Forest, Wendell, and Zebulon with \$1,500 annual, so they'll continue ambulance service. By the contract, ASR isn't obligated to provide service to areas surrounding the funeral homes, except in emergency

situations. ASR will provide 24-hour ambulance service in its service area, and with three ambulances that must meet state equipment regulations. Neither the Raleigh Rescue Squad nor Wake Memorial Hospital will be required to answer ambulance calls. (N&O, 4/5/68)

1969, February 20 – Raleigh Ambulance Service Inc. employees go on strike on a Wednesday night. They are striking because they were informed that their pay was being cut \$10 a week, beginning Friday. Their boss, Gene Clark, said the employees had come to him, and demanded a \$10 a week raise, beginning March 1. Ambulance service would be maintained by him, two drivers who didn't strike, and a number of part-time employees. They maintain two ambulances on call 24 hours a day, plus two back-up vehicles. Five people are on duty at all times. He has seventeen full-time employees, including "the office girl." (N&O, 2/20/69)

1969, February 21 – By Thursday night, there's been no interruption of service due to the strike. About six of the employees who walked out on Wednesday night picked the company on Thursday afternoon. (N&O, 2/21/69)

1969, February 22 – The strike is resolved Friday, by the hiring of new employees. The striking employees were considered fired, as they walked out with only fifteen minutes notice. Only two of the striking employees returned to the company, which has twelve full-time employees, three part-time, and "an office girl." The newly hired men are paid \$75 per week. As they earn their first aid certificates, their wages will be raised to \$85 per week. After a three-month period, drivers will be paid \$100 per week, and attendants \$90. (N&O, 9/22/69)