

History of the Morehead City Fire Department

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Contents

- Timeline
- Notable Fires, Major Incidents, and Mutual Aid
- Chiefs
- Trivia
- Sources

Before 1900

1857 - Morehead City founded.

1860 - Morehead City incorporated.

1883 - By this time, the city has a Howe chemical fire engine with 600 feet of hose, as cited in the 1883 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. See apparatus notes for questions about this apparatus versus the later hand engine.

1890 - By this year, the town had a population over 1,000, with some 150 houses and businesses that were predominately of wooden construction.

1890, circa - Following the destruction of several buildings by fire prior to 1890, citizens and city officials saw the need for better fire protection than the traditional “bucket brigade.” Fires had been fought in the same manner as other communities that lacked a formal fire department. People used buckets or other means to transport and throw water upon buildings that were burning. The city officials consisted of Mayor Allen C. Davis, and commissions C. S. Wallace, A. S. Willis, W. P. Allen, and J. J. Royal. The governing group voted “favorably on the matter of fire-fighting facilities.”^{ph}

1893 - Sanborn Fire Insurance maps list six “fire wells” in the city.

1895, circa - City purchased a Howe hand engine, hose reel, and 750 feet of hose. The pumper was mounted on a four-wheel chassis that was pulled by hand. It was equipped with a suction hose that could be dropped into the town’s seven fire wells (or cisterns). Or could draft water from the sound. The fire department was described as comprised by “most of young men of the town”. And “in case of an unusual fire, all able bodied men of the community gave their assistance.”^{nt51aug09}

1895 - The first Fire Chief was Mayor Allen C. Davis. In the town’s early years, the Mayor was also the Chief of Police. With the formation of the fire department, the duties of Fire Chief were added.^{nt51aug09}

1895 - The fire engine was housed in a small building “erected in the center of Eighth Street over the water, which at that time came nearly up to Arendell Street.” Under the building was a “large cavity kept

full of water by the action of the tide.” Also around town, “large wooden cisterns” were “kept full by surface water.”^{nt51aug09}

1898 - The “most disastrous fire in the [history of the] town” burned buildings at the corner of 8th and Arendell Streets. Burned were buildings on the east side of 8th and the south side of Arendell, at the site of the later Marine Hardware Building. The fire could not be controlled by hand pumping alone.^{ph}

1898 - Sanborn maps list six fire wells.

1900 to 1919

1906 - Morehead City Volunteer Fire Department chartered, after city officials “gave serious consideration for better fire protection” and the organization of a “larger and more effective [fire] department.” This followed “several bad fires” that “were beyond the control of the hand pumping outfit.”^{nt51aug09}

1906 - City purchased its first gasoline-powered pumping engine, red in color, along with a hose reel and a compliment of hose, for \$2,160.00 from Howe Fire Engine Company. This was mounted on a hand-drawn chassis. The resolution to purchase was dated May 18, 1906. The apparatus was delivered in July 1906. To keep the “pumper in condition for immediate use”, Fred Royal was appointed Engineer. He was paid \$5.00 a month with duties of making “frequent tests” as well as “attending the outfit during a fire.”^{ph}

1906 - Mayor C. S. Wallace was instructed to organize a fire department with two companies: white and colored. Members would be exempt from paying taxes. The white citizens responded within a few months and the fire department was organized. The colored citizens apparently didn’t organize, cites one historical record.¹

1906 - Following the purchase of the new firefighting equipment, fire department headquarters was established in the City Hall building at 301 Evans Street (today addressed 811 Evans Street). This was a two-story frame building.² An old school bell was mounted on a post, which served as the fire alarm. This bell was replaced by a “steel tire from a locomotive drive wheel” between 1906 and 1910. By the early 1900s, the top floor of the building had been removed.

1908 - “January 28, 1908 marked a devastating fire which destroyed a row of wooden buildings from the southwest corner of Arendell and 8th to the small one-story brick house which stood on the present site of the Ferebee building. The new power pumper gave good service but there was a lack of water because the cisterns were soon pumped dry. As a last resort to save remaining buildings, the pumper was taken into the sound. However, the salt water and mud had decreased the fire pumping abilities allowing the fire to advance more until brought under control.”³

¹ The town is remembered as having both a white and black fire company. Other documentation cites creation of a second fire company in 1915. This was likely a company of black citizens, based on both the 1906 directive (which apparently was successful) and similar segregated fire companies in such nearby towns and cities as Beaufort and New Bern.

² PH cites the City Hall building as a one-story building by the early 1900s, with its top story removed. This contradicts Sanborn Maps from the period, which are certainly more accurate. Most likely the building was altered after City Hall was moved in 1926.

³ What was my source on this?

1908 - Sanborn Maps describe department as volunteer with forty-five members. Apparatus consists of Howe "triplex" gasoline fire engine, one hand engine, two hose carts [reels], and 1,500 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose. Water supplied by seven fire cisterns, for protection of town "not adjacent to water." Fire alarm is by bell, located at City Hall at 301 Evans Street.

1909 - City officials passed an ordinance for construction of a municipal "water works" system including fire hydrants. This happened after (and presumably as a result of) a large fire that burned out of control and destroyed several buildings, due to the lack of water quantity in the fire cisterns.

1910 - The water system was completed and included fire hydrants which could directly power hand hose streams. Instead of using the pumping engine, the hoses were connected directly to the hydrants. Pressure was provided by gravity from a stand pipe, and could be increased by a pump connected to the water main. By 1913, there were twenty-nine double hydrants installed.

1910 - With installation of the water system, a horse-drawn hose wagon was obtained. The "lightweight wagon" was built by a firm in New Bern, and replaced "the old hose reel." The cost was \$750 and was paid half by the town and half by the firemen. It was described in 1913 as carrying 800 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose. The wagon would later be used "when department members entered racing tournaments at several annual [state] fire conventions." The team won second place at the 1912 convention in Wilmington, and won a "state record" at the 1914 convention in Winston-Salem.^{ph}

1910 - Upon delivery of the hose wagon, the "old pumper" was discarded. This is likely the circa 1895 hand engine versus the relatively new 1906 gas-powered engine. Note: The 1951 News Times story cites the gas pumper as the apparatus discarded.

1910 - The old school bell used for the fire alarm was replaced by a larger fire bell, at "the demand of citizens who wanted a more central alarm system." According to Sanborn Maps of 1913, the bell was mounted in the center of the block formed by 8th, 9th, Arendell, and Evans streets.

1910 - For year ending May 31, 1910, the North Carolina Fireman's Association Statistician's report lists:

- Population: 2,300
- Assessed value of property: \$468,727.49
- Annual cost of fire department: \$_00 (\$100?)
- Value of fire equipment: \$4,550
- Water source: wells, owned by city
- Apparatus: one hand engine, one gasoline engine, two hose carts
- Equipment: 1,350 feet of hose
- Personnel: two hose companies, one paid man, number of volunteers not recorded
- Value of buildings where fires occurred: \$550
- Value of contents: \$250
- Fires: one, caused by children with matches

1911 - For year ending December 31, 1911, the North Carolina Fireman's Association Statistician's Report lists:

- Population: 2,500
- Annual cost of fire department: \$380
- Value of firefighting equipment: \$4,550
- Water source: gravity system, owned by city, 22 hydrants
- Apparatus: one hand engine, one gasoline engine, one hose cart
- Equipment: 1,500 feet of hose
- Personnel: two hose companies, two paid men, 23 volunteers
- Total value of buildings and contents at risk: \$3,700
- Total damage to contents: \$65
- Fires: four, one defective chimney or flue, three sparks from chimney

1912 - Town purchases a horse for the street department, and for responding to fire alarms. The horse's name was Gib, to honor Fire Chief Gib Arthur. He was used to pull the trash wagon when not used for pulling the fire apparatus. There are documented stories that when Gib was working on the streets and heard the fire bell, he would immediately race at top speed to the fire station and then stand and wait to be hitched to the fire wagon. He frequently left his driver, a trail of trash, and a wrecked trash cart somewhere behind him. In 1914, Gib assisted in winning second place in a competition at the state fireman's convention. "That record stands today."

1912 - For year ending December 31, 1912, the North Carolina Fireman's Association Statistician's Report lists:

- Population: 2,600
- Annual cost of fire department: \$750
- Value of firefighting equipment: \$4,600
- Water source: gravity system, owned by city, 24 hydrants
- Apparatus: one gasoline engine, two hose carts
- Equipment: 1,500 feet of hose
- Personnel: one hose company, two paid men, 24 volunteers
- Value of buildings which caught fire: \$40,300
- Value contents: \$8,400
- Total value buildings and contents: \$48,700
- Damage to buildings: \$1,978
- Damage to contents: \$665
- Total damage: \$2,643
- Insurance on buildings: \$3,400
- Insurance on contents: \$500
- Total insurance carried: \$3,900
- Insurance claims paid on buildings: \$1,703
- Insurance claims paid on contents: \$350
- Total insurance claims paid: \$2,053
- Amount saved to property owners: \$44,799
- Amount saved to insurance companies: \$1,487

- Fires: eleven, two defective chimneys, three sparks from chimney, three overheating, four unknown.

1913 - Sanborn Maps describe department as volunteer, one company, thirty members, one paid driver, one horse "worked on streets during day", one hose wagon with 800 feet 2 1/2-inch hose, one hand reel with 500 feet 2 1/2-inch hose, one Howe "gasoline fire engine." Water supplied by twenty-nine double hydrants. Fire station located in two-story City Hall building at 301 Evans Street.

1913 - By this year, a "movement was started" to form a second fire company. They would be located in the "west section of town."^{ph}

1914 - Gib, with the horse-drawn wagon and several fire department members, won first place at the North Carolina State Fireman's competition, setting a time record which reportedly still stands to this very day.

1914 - By this year, the firemen had received new helmets and rubber coats.^{nt51aug09}

1914 - For year ending December 31, 1914, the North Carolina Fireman's Association Statistician's Report lists:

- Population: 3,000
- Property value in city: \$825,000
- Area of city: 1.5 square miles
- Miles of streets: 20 (or 29)
- Value of firefighting equipment: \$4,165
- Water source: gravity system, owned by city, 35 hydrants
- Water system pump capacity in GPM: 100
- Water system standpipe capacity in gallons: 120,000
- River from fire district, in feet: 1,000
- Miles of water main: 2.5
- Service pressure, fire pressure: 45, 120
- Fire alarm: Bell
- Apparatus: Two horses, two horse drawn apparatus, one gas engine, one hand engine, two hose reels
- Equipment: 1,500 feet of hose, 40 feet of ladders, 10 gallon chemicals on all apparatus, six nozzles
- Personnel: two companies, two paid men, 40 volunteers
- Fires: No data recorded.

1915 - Second fire company organized. Believed to be a colored company.⁴ At a later time, perhaps 1920s or 1930s, the remaining black firefighters were merged into the "white" fire company. After that time, the department was reorganized into two companies. Members were placed into companies based on where they lived, east or west.^{oh}

⁴ This contradicts the 1906 information earlier in this document about a black fire company apparently not organizing. Possibly explained as failed attempt in 1906 that became successful by 1915.

1915 - For year ending December 31, 1915, the North Carolina Fireman's Association Statistician's Report lists:

- Population: 3,000
- Property value in city: \$900,000
- Estimated value suburban property: \$20,000
- Area of city: 1.5 square miles
- Miles of streets: 20 (or 29)
- Value of firefighting equipment: \$4,865
- Annual cost of fire department: \$696
- Water source: gravity system, owned by city, 38 hydrants
- Water system pump capacity in GPM: 700
- Water system standpipe capacity in gallons: 120,000
- River from fire district, in feet: 1,000
- Miles of water main: 2.5
- Service pressure, fire pressure: 45, 120
- Fire wells: Five
- Fire alarm: Bell
- Fire stations: Two (previous reports listed only one)
- Apparatus: Two horses, two horse drawn apparatus, two hose reels, two hose wagons
- Equipment: 2,000 feet of hose, 40 feet of ladders, 19 gallon chemicals on all apparatus, six nozzles.
- Personnel: two companies, two paid men, 40 volunteers
- Damage/insurance numbers: [Coming later]
- Fires: Five, one defective chimney, one carelessness, one sparks from locomotive, two overheating.

Fires: eleven, two children with matches, three sparks from chimney, three overheating, four unknown

1916 - Rex, a second horse, was purchased for the second fire company. The horse was purchased from the Statesville Fire Department.⁵ Cuff Willis was the driver.

1917 - Property on 13th Street was purchased and a "suitable building" was erected to house both the horse and hose wagon. Presuming to house the second company only (?), but later housed entire fire department.

1917 - C. W. Styron from Company No. 1 was appointed Fire Chief, replacing G. L. Arthur who resigned after serving nine years. "To comply with a state law," he was "allotted a salary of \$1.00 per year."^{ph}

1920 to 1929

1920 - City purchased from American LaFrance Company a Brockway hose truck for \$5,300. The old Howe gas-powered pumper was sold for \$750. The hose truck was described in 1924 as carrying 1,800 feet 2 ½-inch hose and equipped with a 50 gallon chemical tank.

⁵ Source: Legeros research on fire horses, www.legeros.com/history/horses.

1920 - Gib was retired. He was “offered for sale,” but no buyers presented themselves. He was turned out to pasture.

1922 - City contracted with The Gamewell Company to install a fire alarm system throughout the town at a cost of \$4,356.00. The system was first installed with twelve “automatic telegraph boxes.” Over the years it was expanded to at least 29 boxes. Two diaphone [air-powered] horns, one on each end of Town, were also installed as part of the system.

1923 - The fire bell was retired and replaced by a Gamewell electric-telegraph fire alarm system equipped with fire horns. The bell was subsequently or later moved to the lawn of the municipal building, where it rested in an inverted position and served as a fish pond until 1967. That year, it was restored and placed on display at 202 South 8th Street. In 2007, the bell was again restored and moved to Station 1 at 1406 Bridge Streets. It was mounted on a memorial display on the front lawn. It remains there to this day.

1924 - Sanborn Maps describe department as with Chief (full-paid, also Chief of Police), Asst. Chief (part-paid), Drive (full-paid), twenty-five part-paid men, ten volunteers. Brockway combination chemical/hose truck. Fire station is two-story building on east side of N. 13th Street, mid-block south of Bridges Street. Twelve Gamewell boxes. Forty-two fire hydrants. The City Hall building is still standing at 301 Evans Street.

Note: Though Sanborn lists a combination full-time Fire and Police Chief, the City did not appoint a full-time Fire Chief until the 1970s.

1926 - Fire station relocated with completion of new Town Hall at 801 Evans Street. Two-story building includes an adjoining two-bay, single-story fire station. Upon its completion, a “club room was equipped for members of the department” along with living quarters for “members on duty.” The fire station had two sets of doors that rotated open. They were later replaced by a single rolling overhead door.^{ph}

Note: Alternate (and incorrect) dates for completion have been cited, including 1920 (property tax records), 1925, and 1928 (Pictorial History).

1926 - American LaFrance ships two pieces of apparatus to the town:

- 1926 Type 75 triple-combination pumper, 750 GPM, 40 gallon chemical tank (#297)
- 1926 Type 40 combination chemical/hose truck (#6779).

Note: The Type 75 is likely the circa 1923 motor pumper with booster tank and ladders that the fire department recorded as purchased for \$12,500.

1926 - Upon delivery of the 1926 pumper, a full-time driver was “placed on duty at the fire station.”^{ph}

Circa 1928 - American LaFrance quadruple combination (pumper and service ladder truck) purchased for \$13,850. Described in 1941 as equipped with a 1000 GPM pump and a 90 gallon water tank (converted from chemical tank?) and carried 1,000 feet of 2 ½-inch hose and 235 feet of ladders. The 1920 American LaFrance/Brockway hose truck was traded for \$1,500.00 credit toward the purchase.

Circa 1928 - By this time of the quad's purchase, Company 1 had seven members and Company 2 had eight members.

1930 to 1949

1938 - For year ending October 1, this information was reported by the NCSFA Statistician as originally reported to the state Insurance Commissioner:

- Population: 8,484
- Volunteers: 43
- Paid: Two
- Ladder trucks: One
- Auto hose trucks: One
- Capacity of auto hose trucks: 1,000 (feet of hose?)
- Combination pumpers: Two
- Gallons per minute: 1,500
- Total hose: 4,000
- Alarm system: Gamewell
- Total value of fire equipment: \$45,000

1940 - For year ending October 1, the same information as 1938 was reported by the NCSFA Statistician, with these changes:

- Population: 8,695
- Gallons per minute: 1,600.

1941 - Sanborn Maps describe department as all partly paid, plus full-paid driver. Chief, Asst. Chief, driver, asst. driver, thirty-six men. Apparatus includes American LaFrance quadruple combination (pumper/service truck/1000/90), American LaFrance triple combination (750/40). Nineteen Gamewell boxes. Seventy-one hydrants.

Note: Partly paid members received a small stipend for each emergency call that they answered.

1941 - For year ending October 1, the same information as 1940 was reported by the NCSFA Statistician, with these changes:

- Population: 3,695
- Note the drastic reduction in population size. Due to migrating military population?

1942 - For year ending October 1, the same information as 1941 was reported by the NCSFA Statistician, with this addition:

- Number of pieces of equipment: Four.

1943 - For year ending October 1, the same information as 1942 was reported by the NCSFA Statistician.

1950 to 1979

1951 - The department's first "modern era" apparatus was delivered, a 1951 FWD open-cab pumper (500 GPM) delivered. This was purchased to bring "the equipment up to meet the insurance requirements and to maintain a low rate."^{nt51aug09} The addition expanded the fire department's fleet to two pumpers, one pumper/ladder truck, and one hose truck.

Note: A couple weeks later, the new pumper overturned, killing a firefighter. The truck was repaired and returned to service.

1951 - Line of duty death. Career member Engineer Andrew Bell was killed in a traffic accident while driving the new 1951 FWD pumper to a drill. [Read blog post.](#)

Details: Andrew Jenkins Bell, 54, born 07/03/1896, died 05/01/51 1951, died when the apparatus left the highway and crashed near Newport. He was killed instantly, white male, buried 5/3/1951, Bay View Cemetery, Morehead City.

1950s - Fire department also has a pick-up truck obtained in or after 1951, as pictured in a fleet photograph dated in the (early?) 1950s.

1956, April - Cornerstone laid for new West End Fire Station. Present at the ceremony were Mayor George Dill Jr., Fire Commissioner D. J. Hall, Fire Chief Vernon Guthrie, and Contractor P. D. Brewington.^{nt51aug09}

1956 - Substation opened in west Morehead City, on land adjacent to Camp Glenn School, which was located on the site of old Camp Glenn. The "West End Fire Station" (later named Station 2) was staffed by "trained driver/pump operators" and provided better fire protection for residents in the western part of town. Located at 3308 Evans Street, it was a two-story building with two bays. The property was leased to the city from the county school board. The building materials were donated, and the firemen helped with the labor.

1956, December - The station was dedicated at a fire department fish fry on December 5, 1956.

1956 - New pumper delivered in November, an open-cab 1956 GMC/American LaFrance (750/?, red-white) that was placed in service at the West End station as unit/truck/pumper #6. Also added at the station was an open cab, military surplus 1,200 gallon tanker that was placed in service at the same time. The tanker was built by firefighters and equipped with a small gasoline-powered pump.

1958 - Morehead City Rescue Squad organized. They were formed as a volunteer-staff, non-profit organization that was later contracted by the city and the county for their services, until becoming a city department and then merging with the fire department in 2000. That year, the Lion's Club donated a Chevrolet panel truck that was designed and equipped as an ambulance. The squad was formed by six charter member: Ray Kennedy, Don Foster, Al "Bull" Brinson, Alvan North "Naughty" Willis, James "Jim" Huff, and Oscar Joslyn. The squad was first housed at 504 Bridges Street and later moved to a two-story building at 304 North 25th Street. Their district from the Beaufort bridge to the county line west, all of Bogue Banks from Fort Macon to Bogue Inlet Coast Guard Station, and anywhere else as needed. Their first ambulance was a Packard donated by Major George W. Dill who operated George W. Dill

Funeral Home. They also operated a 1954 Dodge military weapons carrier with a light trailer, that was operated as a utility truck and lighting unit. Over the years and decades, the squad primarily provided ambulance and EMS service.^{oh, ph}

1960s, early - Between 1961 and 1966, two Deputy Fire Chiefs were added to supervise the paid personnel and “maintain the daily operations of the two fire stations.” They were Linwood Wade and Dan Willis.^{oh}

1963 - New engine purchased for Station 1, a 1963 GMC pumper (1000/500, white/red). The apparatus was called “Number 7” and had “No. 7” painted on the doors.

1960s, late or early 1970s - Morehead City Rescue Squad relocated to 304 North 25th Street. Two-story block building with a single double-wide bay. They were equipped with two ambulances and the utility unit. The building was later expanded with an additional single-story bay on the south side of the building. Note: County tax records list 1960 as construction year.

1970s - The 1951 FWD pumper was sold to Sea Level FD.^{oh}

1972, circa - The Mitchell Village/Crab Point Fire District was formed, in unincorporated areas north of the city. The county contracted with MHFD to provide fire protection.

1972 - Pumper and tanker purchased and placed in service at Station 2, to serve both the new fire district and the western section of the city: 1972 Ford pumper (1000/500) as unit/truck/engine 8, and a 1972 Ford tanker (1500 gallons). Their combined cost was \$56,000.

1972 - First VHF radio monitors and pagers were purchased and used as the means to alert volunteers of emergencies, replacing the diaphones and CB radios. They were placed in service in November 1972. The stations were still alerted via a closed-circuit telephone system, and their radios.

1973 - Line of duty death. Volunteer firefighter Anthony Gaylets suffered cardiac arrest during training session.

Details: Anthony Joseph Gaylets Jr., 57, born 12/15/15, died 06/14/73, pronounced dead on arrival at Carteret General Hospital, white male, occupation Hospital orderly, buried 6/16/1973 in Atlantic Comm., Atlantic.

1974 or 1975 - Fire alarm “pull hook” boxes replaced by “phone call boxes” mounted on telephone poles. They’re connected to the police department dispatcher, who handled dispatching for fire calls both inside the city and the rural fire district. The Diaphone horns were also removed around this time.

1975 - Edward Earl Guthrie was named as the City’s first full-time paid Fire Chief. He had been serving as Fire Chief and Building Inspector since 1972, in a part-time capacity for both offices. The addition of the position “was instrumental in the organization of a more structure, professional fire department.”

1976 – The 1951 FWD pumper was sold to Sea Level Fire Department, after the truck was advertised for sale to the highest bidder. SLFD bid \$2,250. Davis FD bid \$1,900 and Harkers Island bid \$1,110. Most departments declined to bid, as the Sea Level need was so apparent. County Fire Marshal J. E. Harrell stated that SLFD needed the truck more than any other department in Carteret County.^{hn76jul-aug}

1978 - Line of duty death. Chief Guthrie suffered a cardiac arrest while responding to a fire call.

Details: Edward Earl Guthrie, 61, born 11/11/16, died, 10/15/78, pronounced dead on arrival at Carteret General Hospital in Morehead City, white male, buried 10/17/78, Bay View Cemetery, Morehead City.

1980 to 1999

1980 - Apparatus delivery: 1980 Grumman/Howe/Hendrickson pumper (Engine 9, 1250/500, white). Replaced Engine 6. Last engine bought by the city that could fit into old Station 1. Also first engine delivered with “Engine” on the side. Purchase price was \$100,000.

1980s, early - Phone call boxes removed after the countywide “enhanced 911 system” is placed in service.^{oh}

1981 or 1982 - Department has thirteen paid employees and forty-five volunteers.^{ph}

1982 - Apparatus delivery: 1982 Ford/Pierce pumper/tanker (Engine 10, 1250/2500, white). Replaced the 1972 Ford tanker at Station 2.

1983 or 1984 - Station 2 expanded one-story bay expansion in rear and living quarters added on west side.^{oh}

1986 - Vehicle delivery: 1986 Ford F-350 Super Duty utility truck delivered with climb-in body. Used as equipment and air resource unit.

1988 - Apparatus delivery: 1988 Spartan/Duplex/Quality pumper (Engine 7, 1250/500, white). Replaced Engine 8 at Station 2. Engine 8 placed in reserve.

1996, or after - Apparatus delivery: 1975 Mack CF aerial ladder (Truck 1, 85-foot, no pump). Assigned to Station 2. Former Newport FD, which bought as surplus from MCAS Cherry Point.^{oh 6}

1990s - Ambulance deliveries included:

- 1996 Ford
- 1998 Ford.

2000 to present

2000 - Morehead City Emergency Medical Services merged with Morehead Fire Department on July 1, 2000. Quarters repurposed later in decade as Station 4, as training facility for Crystal Coast Fire Academy.

2001 - Station 1 relocated to 1406 Bridges Street, along with relocated EMS units from their station on North 25th Street. One-story building with three double-deep drive thru bays. Opened on December 1, 2001.

2002 - Ambulance service upgraded from Intermediate level to Paramedic level.

⁶ The 1996 date is from Lee Wilson, who took a picture of the truck with NFD that year. Thus, the truck was obtained by MHFD in or after 1996.

2003 - Fire boat added, 1984 Mitchell Marine Builder, 25-foot. Surplus from Army COE. Sold in/circa 2011.

2004 - Apparatus delivery: 2004 E-One Typhoon pumper (Engine 1, 1250/750, white) delivered. Replaced Engine 9 downtown, which replaced Engine 8 as reserve. Old Engine 8 sold.

2006 - Apparatus delivery: 2006 Sutphen aerial platform (white/red, 1500/500/70-foot). Replaced Engine 7 and Truck 1 at Station 2. Engine 7 assigned as reserve, Engine 9 assigned as Academy training engine.

2006 - Second full-time paramedic ambulance placed in service due to growing call volume. Shifts reorganized, additional personnel hired, and career company officers promoted and assigned.

Mid-2000s - Ambulance delivery: 2006 Ford.

2007 - Station 3 opened at 5293 Highway 70 West, in partnership with Wildwood Volunteer Fire Department. One-story building with six bays, two of which are converted to living areas. Engine 7 restored to front-line duty and assigned to station along with Medic 2.

2007 - Apparatus delivery: 2008 Sutphen Shield pumper (Engine 3, white/red, 1500/750). Replaced Engine 7, which is returned to reserve status. Assigned to far west end of City.

2007 or 2008 - Station 4 opened at former Morehead City EMS building, a training facility for the Crystal Coast Fire Academy.

Late 2000s - Custom-built enclosed trailer delivered for rescue and air support. The 1986 Ford utility truck was disposed to MCPD, for their special operations unit.

2011 - Apparatus delivery: 2012 Thomas/Sartin medical ambulance bus Purchased with Homeland Security grant. Read blog post.

2011 - Apparatus delivery: 2012 Ford F350 4x4 extended cab pick-up brush unit/paramedic QRV (Rescue 2). Assigned to station 2.

2011 - Fire boat replaced with specially built and equipped Jones Brothers boat. Equipped with twin outboard motors, 500 GPM pump, 2.5 inch deck monitor, and complete electronic package including radar. Also equipped with stokes basket and other rescue gear.

2012 - Station 2 relocated to 4034 Arendell Street. One-story building with three bays. Former Carteret County News-Times building, built in 1977. The administrative offices are relocated from Station 1. Old Station 2 was closed and both the building and the land were returned to the county school board.

2013 - Apparatus delivery: 2013 Pierce rescue pumper (Engine 1, white/red, 1500/750). Replaced Engine 1 downtown. Old Engine 1 renumbered Engine 5 and placed in reserve. Replaced reserve units Engine 7 and Engine 9, which were sold.

2014 - Merged with Wildwood Volunteer Fire Department. City acquired the Wildwood property, which included MCFD Station 3, and equipment: pumper, pumper/tanker, rescue, and ambulance. Wildwood staff was retained and added to MCFD staff.

Present Day

Today, MCFD career staff is comprised of three shifts of thirteen personnel each, staffing three stations 24/7. Plus additional part-time, PRN, volunteer, and administrative staff. As of November 2014, the total strength of the Morehead City Fire & EMS Department is seventy-five people.

Fully-staffed apparatus includes two engines, one quint, two paramedic ambulances, and one paramedic QRV. Other apparatus includes: third ALS ambulance, two pumper/tankers, rescue/air truck, medical ambulance bus, fire boat, and two reserve engines, available for response by career or part-time staff.

Notable Fires, Major Incidents, and Mutual Aid

These are recounted from a combination of oral histories and documented sources.

_____, 1898 - Buildings burned at the corner of 8th and Arendell. Fire started in a two-story building on the corner, occupied by Watson, Daniels & Bell. Used as a general store and seafood business. Adjoining was a small warehouse and a “building used as an ice house.” The hand engine “was of little use” as the fire was fueled by a “strong southwester blowing.”^{nt51aug09}

January 28, 1908 - Night fire destroyed a row of wooden buildings on Arendell Street between 8th and 9th. The “new power pumper gave good service” but the “cisterns were soon pumped dry.” To save the remaining buildings, the pumper was taken to the sound as a last resort. “Salt water and mud had its effect on the fire” and checked it “just before it reached the small office of Dr. Headen.”^{ph}

December 12?, 1928 – Schoolhouse burns. N&O index card, 12/13/28.

July 20, 1929 – Atlantic Beach pavilion destroyed. Mutual aid from Morehead City presumed. Only surviving structure is an office building that’s later moved to an oceanfront lot on West Boardwalk. The structure today is a private residence called the Pagoda House and is the oldest documented structure in Atlantic Beach. Source: [Read more history](#).

April 16, 1933 - Atlantic Hotel destroyed. The three-story building contained 300 rooms and occupied a block on the Morehead City waterfront. Firemen from five other cities responded. The 1880 hotel, a wooden structure, was reduced to ruins within a little more than hour. It was never rebuilt.⁷ Also destroyed was the hotel’s large annex and “cottage row,” a building containing a number of small apartments. Several small buildings were also damaged. The hotel was not occupied. Fire trucks came to help from Newport, New Bern, Kinston (69 miles), Washington (71 miles), and Greenville (78 miles). [Read Gazette story](#).

January __, 1952 – Mutual aid to Beaufort. Commercial fire on Front Street. Morehead City responded along with Newport, Cherry Point, and New Bern. [Read blog posting](#).

March 31, 1955 – Mutual aid to Atlantic Beach. Ocean King Hotel burned along with three other buildings: Ducks’ Hamburger Palace, Reggie’s Bar, and the small building housing the police department. Crews responded from Morehead City, Beaufort, Newport, Cherry Point, and New Bern. They totaled seven units. The Coast Guard fire department from Fort Macon also responded, with their two units. There were no hydrants nor fire department on Atlantic Beach. Most of the water was pumped from the sound, and the Coast Guard units pumped from the ocean. Crews battled the blaze for three

⁷ Source , “Summer Capital by the Sea”; The Atlantic Hotel (1880-1933), <http://dp.la/info/2014/06/10/summer-capital-by-the-sea-the-atlantic-hotel-1880-1933>

hours. The three-room, 75-room hotel was destroyed. The loss of it and three other buildings was estimated at \$400,000.^{hn55may} [Read blog post.](#)

April 25, 1955 – Mutual aid (presumed) to Newport, after a fire in the Croatan National Forest begins moving in the direction of town. The fire had burned more than 60,000 acres of the 153,000 acres in the forest. [Read Herald-Journal story.](#)

October 10, 1955 - The Heart of the Beach pavilion on Atlantic Beach destroyed. With no town fire department, crews came from Morehead City, Beaufort, Newport, and the Coast Guard base. Fire is discovered about 5:00 a.m. and is controlled after about an hour. Firefighters have a close call when a large expansion boiler was thrown some 60 yards from the pavilion. The two-story frame building was a total loss, valued at \$100,000. [Read Dispatch story.](#)

February 12, 1956 - Morehead Theater destroyed and adjoining Belks department store damaged in business district fire. Discovered shortly before 7 a.m. Fire started in rear of theater. Beaufort, Newport, and Coast Guard firefighters assisted. Fire fought for four hours. The 600-seat theater was playing "There's Always Tomorrow." Loss estimated as at least \$100,000. [Read Star-News story.](#)

December 11-12, 1958 – Mutual aid to Beaufort. Nine businesses were destroyed and others were damaged in a fire that started in the rear of Joe House Drug Store. The fire was spotted at 11:50 p.m. and reported from Box 17 at Front and Queen streets. The alarm sounded in Morehead City at 1:30 a.m. and Fire Chief Joe Fulcher responded along with ten men and a pumper. Two more were already in town when the MCFD apparatus arrived. The fire was believed under control when the town's water supply failed. (The mechanical failure was blamed on freezing or corrosion.) Crews began drafting from the ocean. Coast Guardsmen arrived at 3:00 a.m. with a 1,000 pump [apparatus?]. Crews from Cherry Point also responded and stood by. The fire was controlled about 5:00 a.m.

However, by that time, the heat had started a fire on the roof of the wooden building across the street housing the Western Union office and other stores. Crews controlled the second blaze about 6:30 a.m. The firefighters were helped by nearby residents and businesses. Mason Insurance Agency opened its doors so firemen could come and get warm. Coffee was made in the Dora Dinette, until the power went out. Then coffee preparation as moved to Holden's on Turner Street.

The loss was estimated as \$175,000. Destroyed were House's Drug Store at Craven and Front Street, Herring's Jewelry Store, Potter's Grocery Store, and above those businesses, offices of Dr. L. W. Moore, Dr. M. T. Lewis, and Durham Life Insurance. Also destroyed (or considered destroyed, since town zoning prohibited rebuilding wooden structures in the downtown fire district) across the street on Craven were the Service Shoe Shop, the Bargain Center, and Western Union. One firefighter was injured, Beaufort Fire Chief Charles Harrell, who slipped on the ice and sprained his wrist.^{hndec58}

September 29, 1961 - USNS Potomac exploded and burned while docked at Radio Island, across channel from the state port. More than 3,000 military and civilian firefighters responded to scene, from departments nearly 200 miles away. Morehead City fire apparatus was on 24-hour duty for one week, to help contain and eventually extinguish the fire. Radio Island is Beaufort's first-due. [Read blog post.](#)

January 23 (?), 1963 – Styron's Department Store and another business destroyed. N&O index card, 1/24/63.

December 12, 1963 – Danish freighter beaches in harbor with cargo burning in forward hold. The 4,200-ton Birgitte Trom is escorted by the Coast Guard Cutter Chilula and arrives in port just after 2:30 p.m.

with “smoke billowing from two front hatches.” To be determined in MCFD assisted with incident. [Read Wilmington Morning Post.](#)

September 29, 1965 – Mutual aid to Atlantic Beach, when the Atlantic Beach Hotel burned down. [Read Herald-Journal.](#)

August 4, 1966 – Mutual aid to Beaufort, when their town hall and fire station caught fire. The Coast Guard station also sent firefighters to the scene. [Read blog post.](#)

March 15, 1968 – Mutual aid to Atlantic Beach, when Anchorage Motel burned. Beaufort and Coast Guard firefighters also responded. Fire was battled by five fire trucks plus two portal pumping units from the Coast Guard. The blaze was “roaring out of control” when Atlantic Beach firefighters arrived. The frame structure was not in use at the time of the blaze. Source: Hose & Nozzle, May-June 1968; Burlington Daily News, 3/16/68.

November 12, 1969 - Biltmore Hotel burned on Bogue Sound, five miles west of town. Site was on the shore and directly south of the present-day K-Mart shopping center. Four-story, built in 1928. Was undergoing renovations. Beaufort, Atlantic Beach, Newport, and Cherry Point fire departments also responded. [Read Herald-Journal story.](#) Also N&O index card and picture, 11/13/69.

July 4, 1970 - Three businesses destroyed on Arendell Street. Fire started in Morehead City Drug Store, and spread to adjoining building housing Morehead City News Company, a photography shop, and Leary’s Men’s Clothing Store. Police had to clear holiday crowds from several blocks near the fire, so apparatus could reach the scene. Five fire departments assisted. High winds from the southwest aided efforts, instead of east or west winds, which would’ve spread flames down the length of the business block. [Read Dispatch story.](#)

_____, 1976 (spring) – Fort Macon Hotel at 711 Arendell Street destroyed. Built in 1912, the structure was valued at \$13,550. There were no furnishings in the building. The fire department was dispatched at 9:07 a.m. Crews found two fires, one in a closet and one in a front room. Both were intentional. The fire department was dispatched again at 11:54 a.m. The second fire was started somewhere on the third floor, toward the rear of the building. The hotel was destroyed. Thirty MHFD firefighters were assisted by Beaufort, Atlantic Beach, Emerald Isle, and Cherry Point. Nearly a million gallons of water were used.
hn76mar-apr

_____, 1977 (spring/summer) – Wickes Lumber Company on Highway 70, west of town. Damage \$400,000. Arson suspected.
hn77may-jun

April ___, 1977 – Roses at Morehead City Shopping Center. Fire started in stock room. Damage \$350,000.
hn77may-jun

October 29?, 1977 – Roses at Morehead City Shopping Center. Second fire. Damage \$1 million. Source: The Robesonian, October 30, 1977.

June 19, 1977 - Morehead Elementary School burned. The school was located downtown. Two-story brick structure burned on a Sunday afternoon. School was out of session.

August 25, 1983 - Military jet crashed in the 1800 block of Shepard Avenue in a residential area downtown. Four crew members escaped safely. A house at 1802 Shepard destroyed, and one of the elderly residents was fatally injured. [Read Star-News story.](#)

April 26, 1985 – Mutual aid (presumed) to Cape Carteret, for a woods fire that burned nearly 8,000 acres. Some 200 residents are evacuated from mobile homes. Fire departments respond from as far as a hundred miles away, after all manpower in Carteret County is requested to scene. [Read Herald-Journal story.](#)

April 18, 1987 - Diesel fuel tanker truck crashed and exploded on the Atlantic Beach causeway bridge. Accident occurred midday on the new high-rise bridge, which had been opened to traffic a few days earlier. The accident occurred on the south side of the bridge, which was Atlantic Beach's first-due. [Read Times-News story.](#)

August 24, 1989 - Fuel storage tank on Radio Island ignited, after lightning strike. Numerous fire departments responded. Beaufort was again first-due. [Read Star-News story.](#)

April 21, 1997 - Munden Garden Center burned off Highway 70. Crews from Wildwood, Atlantic Beach, and Newport assisted. Regional haz-mat team from Wilmington also responded. The two cities are about 105 road miles apart. The twelve-member team help contain chemicals at the site, such as pesticides and fertilizers. Runoff from the water used extinguish the fire posed a potential environmental hazard. The incident was the first regional response by WFD. The highway was closed for nearly two hours. [Read Star-News story.](#)

April 2, 2006 – Edgewater Motel destroyed by fire. Located on Edgewater Place between North 11th and North 12th streets. Dispatched about 9:30 a.m. Arriving units found the north end of the building, about a third of the structure, fully involved. Six departments assisted on scene: Beaufort, Atlantic Beach, Pine Knoll Shores, Broad and Gales Creek, Wildwood, and Otway. Two others provided coverage for MCFD. Twelve units were located on each side of the building.

April 28, 2007 - The Pac Antares caught fire at the port. The 587-foot freighter was loaded with raw rubber. The fire started in one of nine cargo holds. Multiple agencies responded, including Morehead City, Beaufort, Atlantic Beach, and Wildwood fire departments. The United State Coast Guard also responded. Fire was controlled in about four hours by combination of land-based apparatus and ship-based suppression equipment.

Also, about an hour into the incident, a multi-story wood-framed condominium building at the boundary between Atlantic Beach and Pine Knoll Shores caught fire with a propane-fed, rapidly advancing fire. Personnel at the port noticed the sudden large column of smoke just before the radio dispatch. Some units were immediately released from the port and told to “head for that smoke column.” Other available fire departments from the rest of the county were also dispatched. The lone remaining MCFD engine in service, at Station 2 and covering the city during the ship fire, arrived a condo fire simultaneously with units from PKSFD. These two large fires severely tested the firefighting capabilities of Carteret County. The ship fire was extinguished with damage confined to that one cargo bay, while the condominium building was destroyed.

September 9, 2007 – Mutual aid to Cherry Point, when the Headquarters Building at MCAS burned. [Read blog post.](#)

January 11, 2010 - Forklift operator accidentally punctured containers of a highly explosive substance at the port. The shipment of pentaerythritol tetranitrate came from overseas. The port was closed, and evacuations were urged for people living or working within a half-mile of the port. Many businesses closed for the day.

November 27, 2013 - That evening an EF-2 tornado came ashore as a waterspout in Atlantic Beach, heavily damaging two large condominium buildings before crossing the sound and entering Morehead

City as an EF-1 tornado. It crossed directly over Carteret Community College (causing heavy damage to grounds and several classroom buildings), Carteret General Hospital, and a Duke Energy power substation, before moving northeast through residential areas. Over 100 buildings and homes were damaged within the MCFD response area, with over 4 million dollars in damage just in Morehead City. Most streets and roads in the center of the city were rendered impassible due to downed trees, power lines, and building debris.

Newport, Beaufort, Wildwood, and Otway fire departments responded to the mutual aid call from Morehead City, while Bogue Banks agencies responded to Atlantic Beach. Off-duty MCFD personnel were recalled and a command post was established at Station 2. All reserve MCFD apparatus were staffed and placed in service to answer the backlog of over 50 calls. They also helped crews clearing streets.

The tornado left a path of damage of over one and a half miles long and a quarter of a mile wide across the entire Morehead City area. There were only a few minor injuries and no deaths. Though briefly placed on diversion to out-of-county hospitals, Carteret General Hospital remained open and suffered relatively minor structural damage, while buildings on either side of the hospital property were destroyed. Many cars in the hospital employee parking lot were damaged or destroyed.

Chiefs

As transcribed from the 1951 *News Times* article and the centennial celebration brochure:

1895 to 1906	Allen C. Davis	1943 to 1944	Vernon C. Guthrie
1907	W. M. Webb	1945	William Lewis
1908 to 1916	G. L. Arthur	1946 to 1951	Vernon C. Guthrie
1917 to 1918	C. W. Styron	1952	Grady Bell
1919	E. Stamey Davis	1953 to 1954	Eldon Nelson
1920 to 1927	George H. Nelson	1955 to 1957	Vernon C. Guthrie
1928 to 1929	L. E. Wade	1958-1960	Joe Fulcher Sr. #
1930	H. W. Thornton	1961-1962	Lindsay Guthrie#
1931 to 1932	E. Stamey Davis	1962-1963	El Nelson#
1933 to 1935	Vernon C. Guthrie	1964-1966	Joe Fulcher Sr. #
1936	Grady Bell	1967-1968	Nolan McCabe#
1937	James B. Willis	1969	Jewel Smith#*
1938	Leslie D. Brinson	1969-1970	James A. Griffin Sr.#
1939	Charles S. Canfield	1970-1978	Edward E. Guthrie#*
1940	Thomas D. Lewis	1978-1985	James B. Griffin*
1941	William Lewis	1985-2006	Jerry Leonard*
1942	Edward Swindell	2006-present	Wes Lail*

Volunteer - * Full-Time Paid

Trivia

The Navy Section Facility in Morehead City also operated a fire department. It is mentioned in newspaper articles in 1943.

The Coast Guard base at Fort Macon also operated a fire department in the years and decades prior to the formation of the Atlantic Beach Fire Department. They are mentioned in news stories about fires and mutual aid.

Sources

Notable sources for these research notes include:

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- John Peckham American LaFrance Registry, <http://www.spaamfaa.org/alfresources2.html>.
- Mike Legeros blog postings, www.legeros.com/blog
- Mike Legeros fallen firefighters database, www.legeros.com/history/fallen
- Morehead City Fire Department Centennial Celebration Souvenir Program, Morehead City Fire Department Celebration Committee, 2006.
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- oh - Oral Histories.
- ph - Pictorial History of Morehead City, Community Improvement Program Committee of Morehead City's Woman's Club, Terrydale Printing Company, 1982.
- Roger Birchfield FWD Fire Apparatus Users List, <http://www.yngfire.com/deliverylists/FWD.htm>.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.