

Chapter 2- The Nineties, 1890-1899

1890

12,678 people and 1.8 square miles

Developments in Raleigh by 1890 included the first Southern Bell telephone exchange, the first electric power service, and the first street cars. The first trolley route was inaugurated Christmas Day 1886 with a mule-driven street car. Also during the decade city officials voted to "macadamize" or pave Fayetteville Street, Oberlin Village was built and settled by freedmen, and North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanics opened their main building to 50 students on October 3, 1889.

The fire department in 1890 consisted of six companies: the Rescue Company on Fayetteville Street, operating both a horse-drawn hose reel and their horse-drawn steam engine; the Capitol Hose Company on West Morgan Street, operating a horse-drawn hose wagon; the Independent Hose Company on East Morgan Street, operating a hand-drawn hose reel; and three companies at Metropolitan Hall, the Victor Company and their hand-drawn hose reel, the Hook and Ladder Company and their hand-drawn hook-and-ladder wagon, and the Bucket Company and their hand-drawn bucket-and-ladder truck. By that time, the Phoenix Chemical Company had disbanded and their two chemical engines were now in possession of the city.

The fire department answered 25 alarms during fiscal year 1890. In his annual report, Fire Chief Edward B. Engelhard noted the loss was only "\$1,536.50, with nearly one-half of that loss caused by fires in stores with wooden doors or window shutters, thus the fire [was] not seen until burning for some time." He boasted that "not single house was destroyed." He also noted the need for a modern horse-drawn hook and ladder truck, citing 11 fires on the roofs of houses. The original hook and ladder wagon had already been "ordered sold" and would be disposed of as soon as possible. The Chief's report also cited that the Fire Committee Chairman had requested shut-off nozzles and relief valves for the hose reel companies, to prevent the excessive amount of water lost. With their hoses connected directly to the fire hydrants, water flow was controlled at the hydrant and not at the nozzle.

Improvements during the fiscal year included a new four-wheeled hose wagon, purchased for the city by the Capitol Hose Company.¹ The city furnished one horse for the apparatus. The Chief reported that a new life had been given to the department, in part due to the numerous apparatus and equipment upgrades such as the Capitol company's horse, a double set of drop harnesses for the Rescue Company steamer, and 500 feet of cotton hose. Concluding his report, Chief Engelhard again recommended shut-off nozzles for the reel companies as well as organization of a salvage corps for protecting property.²

By March 1, 1890, the Capital Hose Company had moved into new quarters on the other side of West Morgan Street. The one- and two-story wood-frame building was constructed by the city on rented lots, presumably in conjunction with the fire company becoming horse-powered and thus needing a stable in addition to facilities for storing their apparatus. The building was also equipped with an alarm gong connected to the electric-telegraph fire alarm system.

¹ After years of utilizing a two-wheel hose reel, the Capital Hose Company purchased a horse-drawn hose wagon that they donated to the city. The Board of Alderman expressed their appreciation by adopting a resolution on July 3, 1891:

"Whereas - The construction in the city of Raleigh of one of the most beautiful as well as substantial hose carts for our fire department has been a saving of about \$400 to the business of the city, for, had it been constructed abroad, over \$400 would have gone to enrich others at our expense. Therefore be it resolved, _____ the thanks of this Board are due and the same are hereby tendered to Manufacturers (?) Evans and Martin for their business _____ and pluck in securing the construct in competition with sense of the best equipped establishments in the United States. City Minutes, July 3, 1891.

² *Annual Report of the Mayor and Offices of the City of Raleigh for the Fiscal Year Ending February 28, 1890.*

The new engine house promptly had problems, as Chief Engelhard noted in this annual report dated March 1, 1890. Along with Rescue Company quarters, the Capital Hose house had a leaky roof. The building also needed painting. In addition to the rented lot housing the Capital Hose Company, the city was now paying rent for the Independent Hose Company. They were located in a house on Morgan Street just east of Blount Street. In April 1890, the monthly rental was \$18.75. By March 1, 1891, however, the hose company had disbanded.³

The Victor, Hook and Ladder, and Bucket and Ladder companies were still stored in the east end of Metropolitan Hall, but the Fire Chief's report of March 1, 1890 noted that that end of the building was likely to be opened for other uses and that the apparatus would need to be removed. By March 1, 1891, new quarters for the Hook and Ladder Company were constructed on West Morgan Street. The \$356.36 building, which included a half-stable as the company was now horse-drawn, was located next to the Capital Hose house and on the same rented lot. Also by March 1 of that year, the Victor Company had moved from Metropolitan Hall to the former quarters of the Phoenix Chemical Company at the corner of Davie and Salisbury Streets. The remaining fire company in Metropolitan Hall was the Bucket and Ladder Company. Though they may have moved to temporary quarters that year, they were disbanded upon recommendation of the Fire Commission in January 1892.⁴

On January 8, 1890, the Victor Company presented an "elegant gold-headed cane" to Chief Englehard with the inscriptions "Chief E. B. Englehard from the colored fireman of Raleigh." The President of company was Jasper H. Jones, a former body service of late President Davis. For the ceremony, the firemen all appear in uniform.⁵ One month later, members of the Independent Hose Company presented a "handsome gold medal" to Chief Englehard during a February festival to raise money for a hose reel.⁶ Later that spring, the Capital Hose Company sponsored a concert at Metropolitan Hall on April 8, 1890. The program includes orchestra music, songs, instrumental solos, and "the ringing of the fire bells" by Alderman J. N. Holding. The Alderman tapped box number 34, which was the number near the Alderman's house. The newspaper account wryly noted that those attending surmised that he was learning how.⁷

On March 1, 1890, the two-horse hose reel was moved from the Rescue Company to Victory Company and likely replaced the Victor's hand-drawn hose reel. On March 7, 1890, the Fire Commission was authorized to sell both the 80-gallon chemical engine and the old hook and ladder truck at their discretion. Also in March of that year, Chief Englehard visited New York City and examined the latest ladder trucks for the purpose of purchasing a new one.⁸ Three months later, the new ladder truck was delivered. On July 1, 1890, the *News & Observer* reported "A magnificent shiny, glossy, brand new, red and blue light service city hook and ladder truck arrived yesterday for the Raleigh Fire Department and at once became the cynosure of all eyes. She is a daisy and no mistake. She is forty-five feet in length from tip to tip and stands about eight feet from the ground. She carries thirteen ladders embracing a total of 210 feet of ladder, with all the necessary accompanying hooks, fire axes, buckets, Babcock fire extinguishers, etc. Altogether the machine is a thing of beauty and is light as a feather. It is drawn by two horses. She was placed regularly in service yesterday evening."⁹ The Hook and Ladder Company subsequently named the apparatus W. R. Womble for the Alderman and Chairman of the Fire Committee.¹⁰

[Graphic: Hook and Ladder photo]

³ *Annual Report of the Mayor and Offices of the City of Raleigh for the Fiscal Year Ending February 29, 1891.*

⁴ On January 8, 1892, the Board of Alderman approved the Fire Committee's recommendation that the Bucket and Ladder Company be disbanded and placed out of service, and its apparatus sold. The African-American fire company was formed in 1867. City Minutes, January 8, 1892.

⁵ *News & Observer*, January 9, 1890.

⁶ *News & Observer*, February 27, 1890.

⁷ *News & Observer*, January 9, 1890.

⁸ *News & Observer*, March 21, 1890.

⁹ *News & Observer*, July 1, 1890.

¹⁰ Womble died a year later on November 23, 1891. Upon his death, the Board of Alderman ordered the city's engine houses to be draped in mourning for thirty days.

With most of the city's fire apparatus now horse-pulled instead of hand-powered, equestrian expenses were increasingly common. On September 5, 1890, the Fire Committee reported that certain horses "employed in the fire department and in city work" were useless and they asked that they be replaced at a cost not to exceed \$400. The two horses for the Capital Hose Company were approved, along with a third for the Rescue Company.¹¹ On June 6, 1891, the Fire Commission recommended two horses purchased for Rescue Company along with the purchase of collars and harness for both the Rescue and the Hook and Ladder companies.¹² Also during this period, Chief Englehard was reported as having a "road cart."¹³

News & Observer, July 12, 1890

Fire Alarm

The alarm of fire sounded yesterday about 12:30 o'clock. The fire was soon located on East Hargett Street, and was found to be at the home of Mr. Z. T. Broughton. The department was quickly on hand as usual, and did not take many seconds to head off the flames. The building had caught in the cook-room, which is in the rear part of the house, the fire originating from the stove. Very little damage was done, with the exception of tearing off some of the shingles of the roof, which was necessary to get at the fire. This is another feather in the cap of Raleigh's superb fire department. It is getting to be proverbial that there cannot be a fire of any consequence in Raleigh.

As advances in technology increased the efficiency of fire suppression, changes to city ordinances increased the efficiency of fire prevention efforts. On December 19, 1890, the city ordinances were amended as follows: "Chapter 4, Section 1 - No person shall erect any building or make any additions, alterations, or repairs to any building inside or outside, within the Fire District, as hereinafter designated, without first obtaining a written permission from the Chief of Police. No buildings of wood or any wooden additions, alternations or repair to any buildings shall be erected on the streets bounded by Morgan, Salisbury, Davie, and Blount Streets, nor shall any wooden buildings be removed from any other place to said squares except by consent of the Board of Alderman. Any person violating... The Chief of the Fire Department shall examine all buildings in course of erection, and any additions, alterations or repairs to any building... and report the result of his investigations to the Committee on Fire Department, who shall have the power and authority to enforce... Chapter 4, Section 7 - No sale of explosions without permission... No storage of more than 250 pounds of powder without permission... Chapter 5, Section 5 - The Chief of Fire Department shall inspect, at least four times each year, the buildings and premises within the squares bounded by... and report to the Committee... who shall have authority to order removed or properly stored or protected any combustible matter or other material endangering property from fire... Chapter 5, Section 20 - No one not a member of the fire department shall ride on any apparatus either responding or returning from an alarm of fire. No more than three members of any hose reel or wagon or four members of the hook and ladder company beside the Chief or Assistant Chief or driver shall ride, except by permission of Chief... Any officer or driver has the duty to report violations... Any violator shall be fined \$2 for each offense."¹⁴

¹¹ *News & Observer*, September 6, 1890.

¹² City Minutes, June 6, 1891.

¹³ City minutes, May 15, 1890.

¹⁴ City Minutes, December 19, 1890.

At the end of fiscal year 1891, the fire department had 123 members. In his Annual Report of February 29, the Chief Engelhard recommended that the department consist of four hose reel companies with a total 3,500 feet of hose; a hook and ladder company; a bucket and ladder company; and a salvage corps.¹⁵ He reported that the steamer was kept in reserve, along with the old Victor hand engine and a hose reel with 750 feet of hose. He reported that the Independent Hose Company disbanded during the fiscal year and that two shut-off nozzles were purchased. His recommendations for future actions included shut-off nozzles for each fire company, overhauling of the Rescue steamer, installing tap bells in more members homes, attaching a key to each fire alarm box, and installing a repeater in the fire alarm system.¹⁶

As the horses provided for the fire department were shared with other city departments¹⁷, the City ordinance was amended on July 2, 1891 to include "That the horses now used by the fire department, except the horses put under the control of the Chief of Fire Department, shall be under the control and management of the street department to the same extent as the other horses of the city under the following resolution. That one two-horse reel or wagon and 1,000 feet of hose be on duty at all times and at such other times as the Chief may think it necessary he may call in other teams, and that the horses of the Hook and Ladder truck be not allowed to work on the streets out of the following districts: Edenton, Cabarrus, Blount, and McDowell Streets. That the horses of one of the other reel or wagon teams not be permitted to work on the streets of the following boundaries... 2. The horses when working on the streets must not be used as such beyond the sound of the fire alarm, and at the first sound of the alarm must be drawn with all possible haste to the engine houses and there placed under control and direction of the fire department until the return of the apparatus to the engine houses. 3. During the night the horses are to be kept at the engine houses ready to answer all alarms. The employment and wages of the _____, the purchasing of garage, and everything pertaining to the care of the horses shall be placed under the charge of the Street Committee and the Committee on Fire Department."¹⁸

On October 2, 1891, a resolution from the Fire Committee was adopted reading "the fire ordinances applying to the erection, alterations, repairing, etc. within the fire districts, of certain buildings be strictly enforced; and further urges that the Committee of Fire Department, would not permit the erection, alteration, etc. to buildings of wood, t____, or metal _____, insisting that if said ordinances were not strictly enforced that it would necessitate an increase of insurance rates. The resolution was influenced with input from Board of Underwriters.¹⁹

Though the buildings on West Morgan Street housing both the Capital Hose and Hook and Ladder companies were serving their purposes, the city sought even better facilities for the fire companies. On June 1, 1892, the City Alderman requested that the Fire Committee "report a proper site" for the two fire companies.²⁰ One month later on July 20, the Fire Committee was reported as considering purchasing the rented lots housing the two fire companies. They noted that the lots ran 52 1/2 feet on Morgan Street and were 105 feet deep, and that if the property were purchased it would require two lots.²¹

On July 4, 1892, the fire department performed a demonstration as part of the day's festivities. At 5:00 p.m., an alarm was turned in from Box 23 and all the fire companies turned out. Hose of the various teams was laid out between the market house and J. Hall Bobbitt's drug store, with streams turned on in various directions. The alarm for direct pressure was subsequently sounded and the streams shot high into the air on Fayetteville Street. Other activities that day included the firing of cannon-crackers and attempts by young boys to climb a greasy pole in front of the post office. Two to three thousand people attended the various events that day.²²

¹⁵ It is not known if a fire department-sponsored salvage corps was organized or operated.

¹⁶ *Annual Report of the Mayor and Offices of the City of Raleigh for the Fiscal Year Ending February 29, 1891.*

¹⁷ The horses of the fire company were also used for other duties, including pulling the sprinklers that watered the dirt streets of the city to keep the dust down.

¹⁸ City Minutes, July 3, 1891.

¹⁹ City Minutes.

²⁰ City Minutes, June 1, 1892.

²¹ City Minutes, July 20, 1892.

²² *News & Observer*, July 5, 1892.

After the Caraleigh Phosphate and Fertilizer Warehouse southwest of city burned on August 19, 1892, the issue of the fire department responded outside of the city was addressed by a City Ordinance amendment on October 12. The amendment read "in case of fire outside of city limits, only one hose company will be allowed to respond, except in cases of immediate danger and absolute necessity, or when property within the city limits is endangered from fire outside of the city limits, the same to be designated and determined by the Chief of the Fire Department."²³

On February 2, 1894, a gong for the Victor Company house was approved. Also on that date, street work was approved for both the front and near the Capitol and Hook and Ladder houses on West Morgan Street.²⁴

On March 4, 1895, the Fire Commission was instructed to consider placing the old Phoenix Chemical Company double-tank chemical engine in service with Victor Company.²⁵ There is no record that the consideration was enacted as an action.

On April 5, 1895, the Fire Commission recommended both its usual upgrades— repair the roof of the Victor House, install new doors and frames at the Rescue House— and a new construction item. The Commissioners sought a new building built for the fire department on Morgan Street. All of the requested items were approved, including the authorization to accept bids for the new fire department building with construction costs not to exceed \$4,000.²⁶ On July 5, the bid for the new building was awarded to Hicks, Ellington, and L____. The building would replace the engine houses of the Capital and Hook and Ladder Companies and the Fire Commission was authorized to make the necessary arrangements "for care of apparatus" during the construction.²⁷ By January 1896, a temporary "hook and ladder house" was being used just west of the building site.²⁸

[GRAPHIC: Station 1]

Completed in January or February of 1896, the new headquarters fire station was addressed 112 West Morgan Street. The two-story brick building had three bays as well as tower for drying hose. Upstairs, the facility include sleeping quarters, a recreation room, and an electric room housing the equipment of the fire alarm system. Though called a headquarters station in news reporters, the building was more commonly called the Capital Hose Company house. One year later, the Fire Commission was again looking to improve fire department facilities. On March 5, 1897, the members asked for authorization to purchase a suitable piece of property to permanently building and locate the Victor Fire Company. One month and two days later, however, the need for a permanent building became dire when the Victor Company station caught fire.

²³ City Minutes.

²⁴ City Minutes.

²⁵ City Minutes, March 4, 1895.

²⁶ City Minutes.

²⁷ City Minutes.

²⁸ Sanborn Map, 1896.

News & Observer, April 8, 1897

THE FIRE LAST NIGHT

The Victor Engine House is Badly Damaged

HORSES BURNED TO DEATH

THE FLAMES STARTED FROM AN EXPLODING LAMP

The Loss is Between \$500 and \$1,000 - The Victor Reel Was Not Ruined But is Badly Damaged

The criminal negligence of Joe Penny, one of the night watchmen at the Victor Hose Reel engine house, cost the city upwards of \$1,000, to say nothing of what might have proved a disastrous fire and the pitiable spectacle of seeing two fine horses burned to death.

The Victor engine house is at the corner of Salisbury and Davie streets- a low, rambling frame building. It is divided into three rooms. In the front one, opening on the street, is the hose reel. And here stand, day and night, two of the largest and finest fire engine hoses in the State.

Those at night are in charge of two Negro men, Henry Sorrell and Joe Penny. They are expected to be on duty every minute of the night, and at the first tap of an alarm, hook the horses to the reel. Under no circumstances are both of these men to leave the building at the same time.

Last night, however, a lamp on the reel exploded. Nobody was in the building. In two minutes time, the whole interior was a mass of flames. The horses uttered terrified neighs, but no one came to their rescue. Henry Sorrell had been granted permission to attend a fireman's meeting at Metropolitan Hall, and Joe Penny- nobody knows where he was. He says he had gone to another part of the city lot, but few believe his story.

The first to discover the fire was Ceburn Tate, an old Negro living near by. He heard the frantic kicks and terrified yells of the horses, and tried to open the door, but failed. He kept all the while yelling fire at the top of his voice. The firemen at the Rescue Hose building heard him, and at once came to the rescue. The engine was already on the street before the alarm was turned in by Mr. Joe Correll, who saw the flames from Fayetteville Street. This brought out the other fire companies, and the flames were quickly extinguished.

Before help could reach the place, however, and the doors could be broken open, the noble horses confined within had fallen and perished in the flames.

They fell in such a position as to indicate that to the last they were faithful to their duty, and just ready to spring whenever the door, in response to the clanging alarm, should fly open. After the fire the odor of burning flesh could be easily detected at some distance from the scene of the fire.

The loss is between \$500 to \$1,000. The horses were valued at \$350. The damage to the reel, including 200 feet of injured hose, is about \$150. The harness and other articles burned were worth about \$100, exclusive of damage to building.

The injury to the building, which is hardly worth \$100 at best, is difficult to estimate, as it is probable that it would soon have been torn down or the use of it discontinued, as the Fire Committee is now preparing to buy a lot and put up a handsome new home for the Victor Company.

The April 7 blaze partially consumed the building along with a pair of horses, a hose reel, and 100 feet of hose. Started when one of the lanterns on the reel exploded, the flames were quickly extinguished by the nearby Rescue Company.²⁹ With the destruction of the station house, the Fire Commission recommended the immediate purchase of a pair of horses and wagon, and that the city purchase a lot and erect "permanent quarters" as early as possible. The fire company, meanwhile, was housed in a rented warehouse by June 30 of that year.³⁰ On February 28, 1898, a corner lot at 135 East Hargett Street was purchased.³¹ On April 2 of that year, the fire company moved into their new quarters. The two-story brick station measured approximately 2,000 square-feet and cost \$2,900 including the \$800 lot purchased in February.³²

[Line drawing of Victor House]

The last Sanborn fire insurance map of the 19th century dated January 1896 described a paid and volunteer department with a Chief, Assistant Chief, and 117 men. The department operated from four fire stations, with each drive paid and on constant duty. An extra paid man was housed at each station from 9 until morning. Rolling stock including two two-horse hose wagons, one two-horse hose reel, one two-horse hook and ladder truck, and the Gould steamer in reserve. Some of the horses, however, were used for street maintenance during the day. The fire alarm system had 27 boxes, with 37 volunteers possessing tap bells in their rooms. The water system included the 125,000-gallon water tower on Morgan Street, 151 double hydrants, and nine underground cisterns with an average capacity of 40,000 gallons.³³

In fiscal year 1898, the fire department answered 50 alarms. Fire losses totaled \$12,889.³⁴ At the end of fiscal year 1899, the fire department had 90 members and eight horses. The four fire companies answered 36 alarms as of February 28, 1899. Total losses amounted to \$1,244.03, with insurance covering \$1,197.03. Fire apparatus included three two-horse hose wagons, each equipped with 1,000 feet of rubber-lined cotton hose, a two-horse hook and ladder truck, and the two-horse Gould steam engine in reserve.³⁵

With the steamer in reserve status, the Fire Committee recommended a reduction of pay for the department's Engineer of Rescue Steamer. They noted that the steamer had only been used four times since installation of the water system. Instead of a \$100 per year salary, they recommended \$75 per year to keep the steamer in order and test when necessary, or when called for by Chief. If steamer is placed in service, however, the Engineer would be paid \$25 each time.³⁶

²⁹ *News & Observer*, April 8, 1897.

³⁰ City minutes.

³¹ City minutes.

³² *News & Observer*, _____

³³ Sanborn Map, January 1896.

³⁴ *Annual Report of the Mayor and Offices of the City of Raleigh for the Fiscal Year Ending February 28, 1898.*

³⁵ *Annual Report of the Mayor and Offices of the City of Raleigh for the Fiscal Year Ending February 28, 1899.*

³⁶ City Minutes, July 1, 1898.

Later Fires

The newspaper headline "destructive fire" was common for any blaze that destroyed one or more buildings, as happened in Raleigh's suburban area on **January 31, 1890**. The Temple store and dwelling on Hillsboro Road caught fire between 1 and 2 a.m. Mrs. Temple was asleep in the residential part of the building and awoke after hearing something "fall very heavily." Moments later she was alerted to the fire and had barely escaped the house when burning timbers began to fall. The fire, believed to have started in the kitchen from a stove flue, was first seen by President Holladay of nearby A&M College. He sent a messenger to "alarm the inmates" and soon most of the college boys were on the scene, some both bare-handed and barefoot. They were unsuccessful at combating the blaze as was the fire department, as the buildings were considerably beyond the city limits and any fire hydrants. Some furniture was saved, however, including most of the bedding. A small stock of merchandise was destroyed.³⁷

[GRAPHIC: Sanborn Map]

The first major fire of the decade occurred on **December 28, 1890** when the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad roundhouse at the corner of Johnson and North Salisbury streets burned. The alarm was received at 2:17 a.m. from Box 47. All four hose companies, the hook and ladder company, and the steamer responded to the one-story brick building. Arriving within three minutes of the initial alarm, firefighters found only one working hydrant. They used 2,850 feet of hose for three streams, as well as supply lines to the nearest underground water cistern. When the first stream was finally flowing, the roundhouse was already lost and the firefighters concentrated on preventing flames from spreading to other structures. Damage totaled \$17,500, including 17 locomotives. The fire was caused by waste thrown in a thrown in a locomotive tender filled with wood.³⁸

Two days later, the *News & Observer* printed a letter from Chief Englehard remarking "The pluck of the Raleigh Fire Department was put to a severe test at the Sunday morning fire at the Raleigh and Gaston new roundhouse. The night was one of the coldest of the winter, and the hour was the most unchristian at which a fire could impossibly have occurred. Any body who thinks it is fun to do duty on a hose team on such a night, with the very spray of the water freezing in the air and with a hat freezing on a man's head ought to try it, that's all. But the Raleigh department was on hand and turned on water within three minutes." The paper also included a letter from the General Manager of the railroad, a letter from the Mayor, and a letter from the Chief to the Mayor.³⁹

[GRAPHIC: Sanborn Map]

The Caraleigh Phosphate and Fertilizer Warehouse southwest of Raleigh was destroyed by fire on **August 19, 1892**. Discovered just after dark in the acid chambers, a "mammoth structure" measuring 250 feet long and 60 feet high, the blaze began in a burner room used for making sulfuric acid. Several fire department members responded and assisted, though they were unable to take their apparatus outside of the city limits. The company, located past the Insane Asylum on Asylum Road, had a \$5,000 water system with seven hydrants and a pump. After the pump became disabled, the firefighters relied on gravity-fed pressure from the 10,000-gallon tank on top of the manufacturing mill. By 9:30 p.m., the entire structure was in ruins. The entire building and its contents were destroyed, with an estimated \$25,000.⁴⁰

³⁷ *News & Observer*, February 1, 1890.

³⁸ *News & Observer*, December 30, 1890.

³⁹ *News & Observer*, December 30, 1890.

⁴⁰ *News & Observer*, August 19, 1892.

Over 4,000 tons of sulfuric acid spilled onto the ground during the fire and likely soaked into the water table. Seven years later, problems with the city water supply were reported. During a special meeting of the Board of Alderman on March 10, 1899, the Committee of Physicians reported that water supplied by the Caraleigh Phosphate Mills was contaminated. They cited the cause as either the 1892 fire or the tipping over of a large vat in 1898. The physicians reported that the contaminated water was in their opinion "injurious to health, and unfit for domestic use" and while "causing disordered digestion and bowel disturbances" was not necessarily "dangerous life." They recommended that the city's water supply pipe running through that area be relocated a safe distance from the contaminated area.^{41, 42}

News & Observer, April 16, 1896

MUCH ALARM - LITTLE FIRE

At three o'clock yesterday afternoon there came an alarm of fire from box No. 12, corner of Polk and Person streets. People paused for a moment to watch the fire trucks rattle by, and then started about their business. They knew the ability of the home department and didn't worry. But then came in a second alarm. Someone looked over in the northeast section of the city and saw hovering there a cloud of black smoke. Then a rush commenced. Fire engines and hose reels went pell melle through the streets. People rushed pantingly along the sidewalks; hackmen hit their galloping horses viciously in their haste. Everybody went to the fire on foot, on horseback, in carriages, street cars, and on bicycles. Another alarm came in; excitement naturally increased. But the alarm was about all there was to the fire. At the house of Mr. W. S. Barnes on East Street, a chicken house was utterly consumed. A lady hen received a severe shock to her nervous system, and had her unhatched brood prematurely fried.

One of Raleigh's oldest houses burned on **November 10, 1895**. Built before 1820 and located on Fayetteville Street near the corner of Davie Street, the wooden structure was reported ablaze about 7:00 p.m. on a Sunday night. Within thirty seconds of the fire bell's ringing, the Rescue Company hose wagon reached the nearest hydrant. The fire was located in the garret, between the last story and the roof, and the firemen battled the blaze for about an hour before extinguishing. One fireman had just returned from his bridal tour and was given the "cheerful duty" of holding the hose. Another fireman lugged a line up to the roof and, when he reached the curb, he "had the pleasure" of having his face washed with 120 gallons of Walnut Creek that spouted from a hose on the other side. The newspaper accounts of the incident included information about the house. Between 1835 and 1840, its occupant was an old man named John Hinton and "of whom many queer stories were told."⁴³

[GRAPHIC: Fire drawing]

⁴¹ *News & Observer*, March 11, 12, 1899.

⁴² *Raleigh: An Unorthodox History*. No corrective action was taken for decades. In 1985, a North Carolina State researcher tested the city's drinking water by filling a pool, placing fish in it, and observing them promptly dying. Each time rained, he concluded, sulfuric acid leached into the city's water supply and produced enough acid to kill fish.

⁴³ *News & Observer*, November 12, 1895.

The Seaboard Air Line Railway machine shops on Johnson Street burned on **April 22, 1896**. The fire was discovered at 4:45 a.m. on a Wednesday morning by the night watchman. He aroused the night yardmaster and other employees, who tried to reach the fire hose and pump at the machine shop. With no key to the building and unable to break the door, they pulled a city alarm box. The engineer of the switching engine also began blowing the whistle to alert others of the fire. Within three minutes of the alarm being transmitted Raleigh's fire companies were on the scene. Firefighters were unable to save the building, so attention was turned to saving the railroad cars and other structures near the shop.

One group of firemen directed a steady stream of water upon the roundhouse, which was located at the northern end of the shops. Other firefighters were protecting an oil tank, railroad cars, and buildings on the west side of the fire. The most heroic fight, however, was fought at the northwest corner of the burning structure. Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property was endangered by a small building containing 40 to 50 barrels of oil. If the barrels ignited, the exploding oil would consume everything in the vicinity. The volunteer firemen stood their ground, in spite of the intense heat of the wind-fed flames. Ultimately, the fire was confined to the machine shop, though sparks and burning embers were carried nearly a mile away by the wind. By 7:30 a.m., only smoking beams, bare walls, and exposed machinery remained of one of the best-equipped railroad shops in the South. The loss was estimated at \$65,000. One-hundred and fifty workers were employed at the facility.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *News & Observer*, April 23, 1896.