

Early Raleigh Fire Brigades

By Michael J. Legeros

By the end of the 19th century, North Carolina's Capitol City of Raleigh was thriving with commerce and industry. There were factories, mills, plants, and shops, both inside and outside of the city. Private fire equipment ranged from pails and extinguishers to entire water systems. Many institutional facilities were also located outside of the city limits, and were thus equipped with personnel and apparatus for fighting fires. One of the larger caches of fire equipment was located at St. Augustine's School in 1914. The college had three hand-drawn hose carts and a hand-drawn ladder truck, as well as a dedicated building for storing the apparatus. Sanborn Maps from this period provide detailed information about these early fire brigades, which are recounted below. This is version 1.0 of this document, created in July 2009.

In February 1888, the **Raleigh and Gaston Railroad repair shops** at the corner of North Salisbury and West North streets had two fire pumps, one hose cart, 400 feet of 2-inch and 2 1/2-inch hose, and ten single private hydrants, while the **Ruffin Roles furniture company** at the corner of West Jones Street and Saunders Street had a hand fire pump and 60 feet of 1 1/4-inch hose. The **Ellington, Royster, and Company Planing Mills and General Building Supplies** at the corner of West Jones and North West Street was equipped with fire pails, 100 feet of 1 1/2-inch hose on reels, and eight small hydrants. The **Raleigh Oil Mill and Fertilizer Company** at the corner of West Davie and North Harrington Street had fire pails in all buildings, plus 100 feet of 2 1/2-inch standard hose.

In January 1896, the **North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts**, located two miles west of the State Capitol and outside of the city limits, had a 65,000-gallon reservoir connected to a 320 gallon-per-minute fire pump. Their system included five dry hydrants and 400 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose. The **Insane Asylum of North Carolina**, located one-and-a-quarter miles southwest of the State Capitol and also outside the city limits, had water tanks totaling 515,000 gallons, a system of gravity and direct pumping that included a 1,000 gallon-per-minute fire pump, and a couple thousand feet of hose stationed in various locations. Down the road from the asylum, the **Caraleigh Phosphate and Fertilizer** was equipped with a 10,000-gallon water tank, a 500 gallon-per-minute fire pump, and seven "outside hydrants," all with 2 1/2-inch fittings, but not "city thread."

The **Raleigh Cotton Mills**, located three-quarters of a mile north of the State Capitol and also outside the city, was also equipped with a water supply and fire pump in January 1896. The cotton mills, however, utilized an automatic sprinkler system. All rooms in the mill were equipped with sprinklers. The **Caraleigh Cotton Mills**, located one-and-three-quarters miles southwest of the State Capitol and also outside the city, were also equipped with automatic sprinklers. The Caraleigh Mills, which housed 7,380 spindles and 268 looms, was also protected by five outside hydrants and 1,000-feet of 2 1/2-inch hose.

In July 1903, smaller systems were present at facilities such as the **Old Soldier's Home** at the corner of New Bern Avenue and Tarboro Road. Located on the former State Fairgrounds site and outside the city, the facility's fire equipment included 100 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose supplied by

a well pump. **St. Augustine's School**, located one mile northeast of the State House and outside the city, had 300 feet of one-inch hose supplied by a steam pump from spring-fed water tanks. The **Peace Institute for Young Ladies** on Harp Avenue had no fire apparatus, but their cistern was equipped with a "suction attachment" for the fire department's steamer. The map also noted that the main building was located 400 feet from Peace Street and the city hydrant system.

City hydrants were also present at the **Seaboard Air Line Railroad's** lower cotton platform in July 1903. Three city hydrants were present, with one located on the platform and equipped with 100 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose. The platform was also protected by 16 water barrels and 34 metal fire pails. The **Carolina Ice Company** and the **Raleigh Ice and Electric Company**, both located on West Hargett Street, also utilized city hydrants with 100 feet of hose attached. Hydrant pressure was sufficient for extinguishing most fires in the city. The volunteer Raleigh Fire Department used hydrant pressure for most fires, and utilized their horse-drawn steamer only when outside the city limits, or when hydrant pressure was insufficient.

By August 1909, **St. Augustine's School** was connected to the city water system and had a fire department equipped with a hose reel and 500 feet of 2 1/2-inch cotton rubber-lined hose along with two fire extinguishers and two dozen fire buckets. The hose house was attached to the north end of a lumber building just east of the Lyman Building. Also by that time, the **North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts** had a hose reel on their campus, housed at the Mechanical Department building, as well as other lengths of hose at other locations. The campus water system had six hydrants connected to a 75,000-gallon reservoir.

In 1914, the **St. Augustine's School** fire department had moved to a combination hose and coal house just north of the prior location. The college's equipment consisted of three hand-drawn hose carts, 1,200 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose, and one hand-drawn ladder truck, and fire pails. At the **North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts** that year, the hand reel and 500 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose had been moved to Watauga Hall. The college had 1,650 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose total and ten double hydrants. **St. Mary's School** on Hillsboro Street was connected to the city water system, with two hydrants on campus, and two "vertical pipes" with 600 feet of 1 1/4-inch hose attached. They also had "chemical extinguishers well distributed." On the city's south side, **Shaw University** was indicated as having "no fire apparatus."

Also 1914, the Insane Asylum, now called **Dix Hill State Hospital**, was equipped with hand hose reels, one stored at the pump house and one stored at a hose house just west of the recreation yard. The facility also had about 2,000 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose, which was supplied by a 450,000-gallon reservoir and a 1,000 gallon-per-minute pump. The **Seaboard Airline Railroad Shops and Round House** on West Johnson Street also had a hand reel with 300 feet of 2 1/2-inch hose at the engine repair shop. Their water source included nearby city hydrants and a pair of 300,000-gallon elevated water tanks.¹ The **North Carolina State Penitentiary** off West Morgan Street was connected to the city water system and likely had fire equipment, but insurance map indicate only "admittance refused."

¹ The railroad fire company even petitioned the city ten years prior to be recognized as an "independent company" of the Raleigh Fire Department. Their request was presented to the Board of Alderman on March 3, 1899, and was referred to the Fire Committee.

Figure 1 – Sanborn Map, 1888

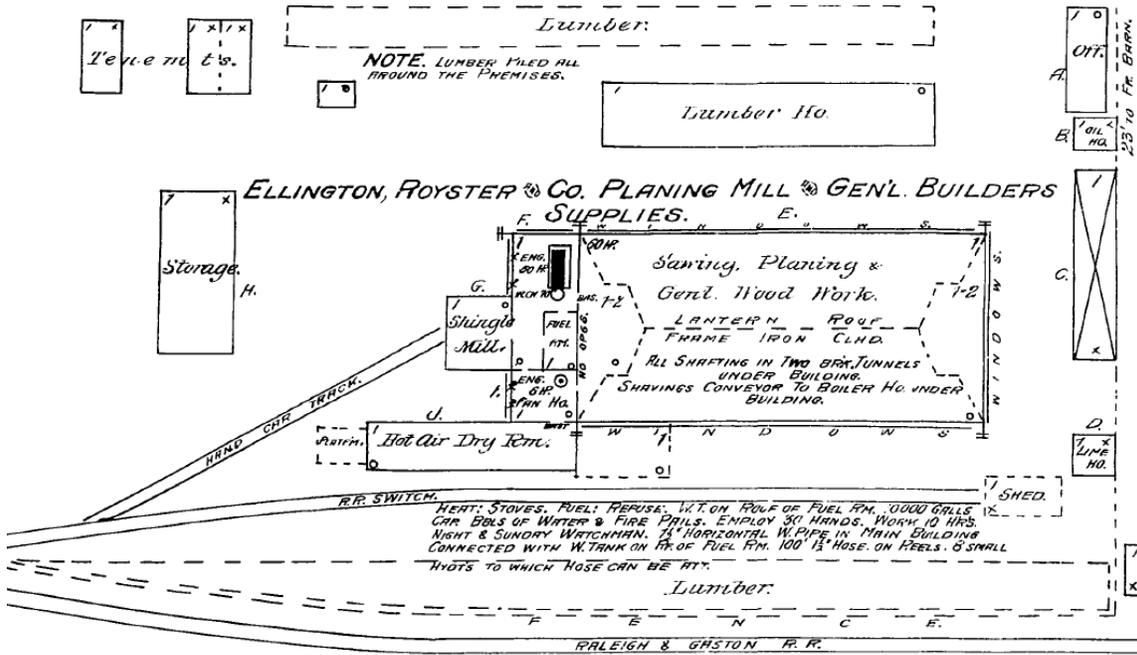
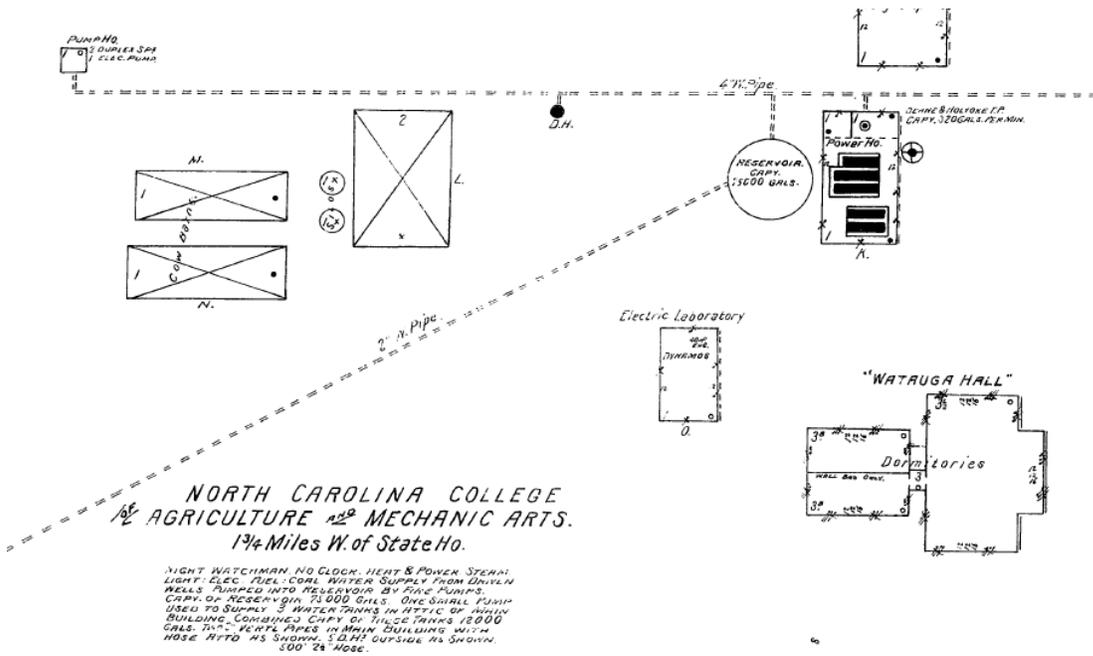


Figure 2 - Sanborn Map, 1903



References

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, February 1888,

ibid, January 1896

ibid, August 1909

ibid, 1914