

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services History

It is estimated, the first fire department in Wilson was organized around 1880 and was completely volunteer. Fire protection at this time consisted of the bucket brigade until the year 1887. In early 1887, a steam pumper was purchased, which was horse drawn, and water to supply this pumper was taken from cisterns located in the streets. The steamer was a Silsby 5th Size, registration #914. 5th size meant it pumped between 300 and 500 gpm. The first cistern was located on N. Goldsboro St. in front of what is now the Woodard Building. The first fire station was located on N. Goldsboro St. where the parking lot adjacent to the Municipal Building is now located.

A major improvement in firefighting occurred in 1892. A small pump station was installed on Toisnot Creek, at the present location of the bridge across the creek on Corbett Ave. Hydrants and mains were installed but water was not purified and was used only for fire protection.

In 1913, the first motorized pumping engine was purchased from the American-LaFrance Company of Elmira, NY.

To drive and maintain this vehicle, Captain L.F. Murray was hired from Goldsboro to become the first paid fireman in Wilson. He remained with the department until his death in 1934.

In February 1922, Wilson FD had two companies at the fire station located at City Hall. It housed the Chief, Assistant Chief, two paid men, and 20 volunteers. Two American LaFrance triple combination motor trucks each with a 750-gallon chemical tank and 1,200 feet of 2 ½-inch hose. 1,800 feet of 2 ½-inch hose in reserve. Reo motor truck equipped as hook and ladder planned.

Colored Company, no firehouse: One paid man, 12 volunteers. Gamewell fire alarm system with 24 boxes and bell at pumping plant. Alarm given by bell on City Hall and whistle at municipal light plant.

Population at this time was approximately 12,000.

In 1924, fire destroyed the fire station and the old city hall located then on Goldsboro St. A new station was built in 1926 on N. Douglas St. In 1985, a new headquarters station was built at 307 W. Hines St.

The first organized department manned by paid uniformed firemen was organized on August 1, 1938. There was 11 full time men and 26 call men – volunteers who received a small monthly salary whether or not they fought any fire. The new department was equipped with four trucks, three were pumpers and one a ladder truck.

Some of the first known fire chiefs to serve Wilson were Billy Simms, Earnest Nadal, Doane Herring, Ed W. Davis, and V.C. Martin who were all volunteers.

In 1938, A.L. Lancaster, who had been a volunteer chief since 1931, was appointed as the first paid chief and served until his death in 1949. July 1, 1949, T.R. Bissett was named chief and remained until his retirement in July, 1971. In July 1971, Ben Williams was appointed chief until he retired in 1985. C.B. Rose was named chief in 1985 and served until he retired in Dec., 1991. Don Oliver was then hired as chief in March, 1992 and served until he retired in September, 2017. Currently Albert Alston serves as the Wilson Fire/Rescue Service Fire Chief.

The first piece of fire apparatus bought by the City of Wilson was painted battleship gray with gold trim. This color remained until 1939 when it was changed to red and continued until 1973, when it was replaced by lime yellow. The greatest change in fire trucks came about in 1973, with the purchase of Wilson's first truck with an enclosed cab, which could seat five men. This unit was the first truck painted lime yellow and also the first to have a diesel engine, air brakes, and power steering.

Today, the City of Wilson maintains through Wilson Fire/Rescue Services fire stations, 20 emergency response apparatus, and 93 career firefighters protecting 29.2 square miles. Our current population is just over 50,000.

