

History of the Fire Department (Extended Version)

(Extended Version)

The year was 1869. The Civil War had ended four short years before. The assassination of President Lincoln and the abolition of slavery were still discussed in parlors and saloons across the country. Hostile Indian raids occurred with some regularity in the great Southwest. The Transcontinental Railroad was completed with the driving of the golden spike at Promontory, Utah. The territory of Wyoming had passed the first women's suffrage law in the nation. Almost unnoticed amidst other events, William H. Spurgeon founded the Village of Santa Ana among vast mustard fields in Central Orange County after purchasing seventy acres of land from the Yorba family.

From 1869 to 1883 the Village of Santa Ana grew steadily and by May 1883 civic leaders had fully recognized the need to establish a fire department. On May 25, 1883, a group of concerned businessmen held a meeting in the office of Judge George E. Freeman. The end of the meeting had affirmed formalizing a fire department affirmed as a Village priority. Spurgeon was named Chairman of the formation group and Judge Freeman as Secretary. An election was held, and the residents of Santa Ana approved a tax of ninety cents per \$100 of assessed valuation for the support of a fire department (net \$2,000).

Under the provisions of Section 3335 to 3343 of Chapter XIV, Title VII, and Part 3 of the Political Code of the State of California, dated March 9, 1881, the Santa Ana Fire Department (SAFD) was finally organized on November 1, 1883. A three man Board of Fire Commissioners was established, consisting of Spurgeon, L. Gildmacher, and Henry Neill.

The first SAFD roster showed the Chief as C. E. Berry, the first Assistant Chief as D. C. Lyon, and the second Assistant Chief as Theo Cobler. Thirty-two additional members were listed, and both Spurgeon and Judge Freeman were honorary members. Moreover, the first firehouse was erected on the west side of Sycamore Street, between Third and Fourth Streets. The operations of the SAFD went smoothly. They drilled regularly but were not called often. After one year, Chief Berry resigned and the first Assistant Chief, D. C. Lyon, was elected Chief on November 1, 1884.

In 1885, firemen were in need of a bell with a suitable tower to summon them in the event of a fire. In July of that year an election was called to vote on the proposition to purchase a bell, erect a bell tower, and provide the funds necessary to operate the SAFD. The total cost of the project was \$550. When the ballots were counted, it was found that the proposition had failed fifty-one to fifty-four. The SAFD was severely affected by the election result. On July 28, 1885, a SAFD meeting was held, resulting in the resignation of the entire volunteer department.

The "Village" of Santa Ana continued its rapid growth and thus, the "City" of Santa Ana was born June 1, 1886. The original journal of the Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the City of Santa Ana indicates the importance of the fire protection issue. A meeting of the Board of Trustees held on July 21, 1886, resulted in the adoption of Ordinance #6, the first fire prevention regulations. Section 5 of this ordinance stated that the Town Marshal shall act as the Fire Commissioner (Fire Marshal). In Ordinance #15, August 11, 1886, the Board of Trustees established the City Fire Department. Section 1 provided for a Chief, an engine and hose company of at least ten but not more than sixty-five men, and a hook and ladder company of at least ten but not more than sixty-five men. Section 2 stated that the City Fire Department was to operate under Sections 3335 through 3343 of Chapter XIV, Title VII, and Part 3 of the Political Code of the State of California. Section 3 established the Fire Chief's salary at "\$8-1/3 per month." As a result of these ordinances and the revival of the SAFD, on September 30, 1886, the Board appointed Trustee A. Snyder as Commissioner of Fire and Water and Adam Forster as Chief of the SAFD.

The establishment of the Santa Ana Gas Company in August 1886 may have hastened the Trustees in their efforts toward the reactivation of the SAFD. Many were quite skeptical of this technological advancement, considering it more of a fire hazard than a source of illumination. The equipment and apparatus of the "new" SAFD were the same as that used by the original department. Only a few of the "old" firemen elected to become members of the "new" group. An old school building was donated by Spurgeon to house the new SAFD at Fifth and Sycamore Street. Furthermore, in October 1888, an election of the Fire Chief by SAFD members was held, and James P. Browne was elected as Chief Engineer and the Trustees affirmed his selection.

On December 1, 1890, \$60,000 was approved by the voters in an effort to build and maintain a Municipal Water Department including "fireplugs". Up until this time private wells or cisterns had provided all water, including that for firefighting. With the fireplugs came "hose carts" -- large two-wheeled vehicles with a reel of fire hose located between the two wheels. These were first hand-drawn and later horse-drawn. Around 1892, a total of two hose carts were placed in service. Large volumes of water could now be applied, provided there was adequate pressure in the municipal water system. This was put to the test in 1892 when a large fire struck the Stern-Goodman's Store, located at 306 W. Fourth Street on Washington's Birthday. After the fire, Chief Browne issued an order that residents should not use water during a fire because not enough force could be obtained through the fire hose to make a respectable stream. The Trustees agreed, as they shortly thereafter voted to arrest and fine \$25 to anyone caught sprinkling during a fire.

Competition among the two hose companies and the hook and ladder company surfaced with the hose carts. Each company wanted to be the first to reach the fire since many of the firemen were also influential citizens and thus, had persuaded the Trustees to pay \$2 to each member of the first company reaching the fire, \$1.50 for the second company, and \$1 for the third. This only intensified the competition, with some firemen more interested in winning the race than in fighting the fire. In February 1899, the Trustees finally decided something had to be done to prevent absolute chaos in the streets during a fire. They voted to pay \$2 to each fireman who could answer roll call at a fire but with no compensation given unless the firefighters' services were needed. This action created a furor within the SAFD, and talk of a second mass resignation began. The Trustees, desiring to avoid such an action, voted in May 1899 to pay each member \$2 for a fire and \$1 for a false alarm or a fire extinguished prior to their arrival. This satisfied the firemen and no interruption in fire protection occurred.

After Chief Browne resigned to assume a position with the Municipal Water Department, his first Assistant Chief, W. C. Young, was elected Chief Engineer. The Trustees duly appointed him on February 23, 1900. Moreover, with a new Chief Engineer in place, demand to build a new firehouse surfaced. On December 16, 1901, the Firemen's Cooperative Association was incorporated for the purpose of purchasing a lot to build a new engine house. A lot was purchased across the street from the existing station at 307 North Sycamore.

During 1904, there was much activity within the SAFD. A new combination chemical engine and hose cart was fabricated in Chief Young's blacksmith shop. The two-story brick fire station on Sycamore was completed and the fire alarm system was installed. Three horses with complete harness were purchased, and Ike Fields, who operated a freight transit company and would need to unhitch his wagon on the street and proceed to the fire at a full gallop, was no longer required to do so. This team of three horses was in service for approximately ten years before being replaced by motorized fire apparatus. As soon as all firemen were convinced that the new horseless apparatus could in fact replace the horses, the team was transferred to duty in the Street Department. Perhaps the most important event was the hiring of Monte Jackson as the first full-time paid driver. He was assisted by Robert Moffitt, Theo Lacy, Joe Preston, and T. H. Newman. Jackson worked a twenty one-hour per day and seven days a week shift.

One of the more sensational chapters in the history of the SAFD concerned the burning of Chinatown. A leper was discovered living in one of the shacks near Third and Bush Street. The area was covered with small, closely built wooden structures, many of which were connected by a maze of underground tunnels and inhabited by people of Chinese ancestry. After the leper was found, a secret meeting of the Board of Trustees was held. It was decided that the SAFD would raze the area by fire, thereby sparing the remainder of the City from the dreaded disease. On May 25, 1906, the SAFD arrived to surprisingly discover a crowd of several hundred people gathered to watch the spectacle, since this plan was a closely guarded secret. The fire was started with hose lines used to protect the exposures. These lines, along with a light rain that was falling, prevented the fire from spreading beyond the intended area.

At the end of 1916, Chief Young resigned as the Chief Engineer after more than sixteen years as Chief and approximately thirty years with the SAFD. During his career, the SAFD had progressed from hand-drawn and horse-drawn equipment to motorized apparatus and from an all volunteer department to a partially paid one.

The first paid member of the SAFD, driver Monte Jackson, was appointed Fire Chief in January 1917. Chief Jackson's administration began with a world at war. Times were uncertain, and political forces pulled in all directions. Jackson served as Chief for only eighteen months, failing to be re-elected by SAFD members. Thus, John Luxembourger was elected to succeed Jackson and appointed Chief on July 27, 1918. Luxembourger's appointment differed from that of his predecessors in that he was appointed as a full-time Fire Chief. At the time of his appointment, Chief Luxembourger assumed control of four paid firefighters and about thirty-five volunteers. Shortly afterward, and at the forefront of other larger cities, the SAFD went on the "two platoon" system. New York City would use this schedule eighteen months later. This particular two platoon system meant an eighty-four hour work week with every other weekend off.

In 1921, a new brick station was built on North Sycamore Street near Third Street. This was the first station built to house two companies. Two more stations were constructed in 1924 - one at 1314 West Third near Bristol and one at 1204 East First Street. The station on West Third served the SAFD for many years, but the East First Street site proved to have been a somewhat poor location. It was replaced in 1926 by a station at 414 North Eastwood (at Fourth Street). The 1904 fire alarm system was also replaced in 1924 with an eight circuit Gamewell System.

In 1927, Fire Station Number (No.) 4, located at 625 South Cypress, was added. This station was the Communications Center and the receiving station for the fire alarm system. As the City continued its growth and expansion, Fire Station No. 1 was moved to 1322 North Sycamore (at Washington) in 1929. It served as headquarters, containing the Fire Chief's office and the Fire Prevention Bureau. The SAFD also expanded by eight members. Unfortunately, with the country in the midst of the Great Depression all development came to a virtual standstill during the early 1930's. The SAFD was no exception.

In 1937, a team from the National Board of Fire Underwriters visited Santa Ana to review the progress made on their survey recommendations from a previous evaluation (1929). Considering the economic climate of the intervening years, considerable progress had been made. Nevertheless, the City of Santa Ana and the SAFD responded to the evaluation issued by the Underwriters. Assistant Chiefs John Garthe and Elmer Gates were added at the urging of the National Board. Frank Corey, later of the State Fire Marshal's Office, became the City's Fire Marshal upon Gates' promotion.

Additional apparatus and equipment purchases that had been planned would have to be postponed, as the country was rapidly approaching World War II. Not only was apparatus unavailable but many of the SAFD members answered their country's call to military duty. The SAFD's expansion efforts were again delayed due to circumstances completely beyond local control. In 1945 World War II ended, and in 1946 the beginning of the post-war "boom" began.

In 1947 Chief Luxembourger resigned. He had served the SAFD for forty years, twenty-nine as the Chief Engineer. During his career, he had seen horse-drawn apparatus surpassed by motorized apparatus and chemical engines by pumpers. Under his direction the SAFD had grown from four to forty paid firemen, striving to keep pace with its developing city.

After Chief Luxembourger's resignation, the SAFD divided. The departmental tradition of the men electing their Chief, and subsequently having their selection appointed, had not completely vanished. About half of the men supported Elmer C. Gates, who had served as Fire Marshal and Assistant Chief under the previous Chief. The other half of the SAFD supported John Garthe, who had served as the other Assistant Chief under Luxembourger. As a result, city officials decided to hold an examination for the Chief's position. They appointed Gates as Acting Chief until the selection process could be completed. John Garthe was ultimately selected and appointed as Fire Chief on July 15, 1948.

As Fire Chief, Garthe placed a major emphasis on constructing new fire stations and replacing older ones. First, Fire Station No. 4 on South Cypress was replaced by a new Fire Station No. 4 in 1951. The new location was 1441 South Broadway. Second, a new SAFD Headquarters was erected at 120 West Walnut Street in 1952-1953. With the completion of Fire Station No. 5 the old station on South Cypress was completely vacated. Third, the City limits were constantly expanding, and in 1956 Fire Station No.1 was relocated to 1029 W. 17th Street. The station at 1322 N. Sycamore was abandoned. Fourth, Fire Station No. 3 was moved from 1314 West Third to its present location at 419 South Franklin. Fifth, in 1962, Fire Station No. 2 moved from 414 North Eastwood to its present site at 1688 East Fourth Street. This completed Chief Garthe's replacement of all stations that had been constructed between 1904 and 1929. In addition, Fire Station No. 9 was built in 1967. A Training Facility was also constructed with this station, located at 2726 South Grand Avenue. The addition of this company provided badly needed coverage to the heavy industrial area in the southeastern part of the City.

With the frequency of alarms always increasing, the need to provide two on duty Battalion Chiefs was identified. The SAFD activated two duty battalions in February 1968.

On January 1, 1969, the SAFD implemented the three-platoon work schedule. After considerable controversy, among both the members and the administration, the nine-day cycle was agreed upon and has been in use ever since.

On February 27, 1970, Chief Garthe resigned, ending a fire service career of forty-five years. Under his twenty-two years of dynamic leadership as Fire Chief, the SAFD was guided through the Post World War II years and the decades of the 1950's and 1960's. The SAFD had grown from four stations and forty members to nine stations and over two hundred members. Moreover, during his tenure, the City progressed from a National Board Class 6 City to a Class 3 City, barely missing a Class 2. The communications system was judged to be one of the best systems west of the Mississippi River. As a result of Chief Garthe's retirement, an extensive recruiting drive was undertaken to find his replacement. The selection process was completed when Eugene R. Judd, who had twenty-eight years of service with the Los Angeles City Fire Department, was named Fire Chief on July 16, 1970. One of Chief Judd's first successes was the completion of Fire Station No. 10 at 2301 Old Grand, which had been started during John Garthe's tenure.

In 1972, Fire Administration, Investigation and Prevention Bureau moved to their new home in the recently completed City Hall building at 20 Civic Center Plaza. Chief Judd implemented his departmental re-organization during the same year. Engine Company No. 6 was eliminated as a company, becoming a two-piece company with Engine No. 5, wagon and pumper. A fully manned squad company (officer and three men) was placed in service and Battalion Chiefs were assigned aides. Furthermore, a bond election that would have provided additional fire protection and paramedic service for the City failed by a narrow margin. Because of this, Santa Ana, long a leader in emergency medical aid was not one of the first cities in the county to provide paramedic

services. The approval of a utility tax allowed nine firemen to attend the second training class. Soon after going into service in 1973, Medic-52 was the busiest paramedic unit in the County.

Fire Prevention was also emphasized during Chief Judd's administration, with Santa Ana winning top national honors for cities among their size and class in 1973 and 1975. A fire prevention motion picture was produced with the aid of the SAFD declaring: "Santa Ana - The Most Fire Safe City." Moreover, in 1974, "The Most Fire Safe City" opened a new station located at 950 West Macarthur – Fire Station No. 6.

April 30, 1976, was the effective date of Chief Judd's resignation from the SAFD. Chief Judd had provided extremely capable leadership during his five and half-year tenure. High morale and professionalism were emphasized. He lived up to his nickname, "Clean Gene", and took great pride and personal satisfaction in his annual inspections. Quarters, apparatus, and personal appearance were all checked; pride in the uniform, the department, and the fire service was instilled at every opportunity.

After Chief Judd's retirement, an extensive recruiting for his replacement was undertaken.

Bobby Jack (B.J.) Thompson was selected and appointed Fire Chief on August 1, 1976.

Chief Thompson came from Santa Fe Springs, California, where he served as Fire Chief. One of Chief Thompson's primary goals was the completion of a Fire Protection Master Plan for the City of Santa Ana. The talents of SAFD members in virtually every company were used, with Chief Thompson coordinating their efforts to produce the Fire Protection Master Plan.

Even with the budget limits imposed, construction of a new Fire Administration Facility and Fire Station No. 4 was started just north of the existing Fire Station No. 4 on South Broadway. Chief Thompson became City Manager Thompson on February 21, 1979, serving in that capacity until November 30, 1979, when he resigned to become Superintendent of the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Following Chief Thompson's elevation to City Manager, the SAFD was without a permanent Fire Chief until William J. Reimer was appointed to that position on December 1, 1979. Chief Reimer began his fire service career as a firefighter in Santa Ana in 1963. When appointed, he became the first Fire Chief in thirty-one years to achieve that rank from within the SAFD.

A year of instability from interim chiefs and the effects of lowered manning levels imposed during Proposition No. 13 had left many areas in need of attention by the new Fire Chief. In his short tenure, Chief Reimer demonstrated his skills as an innovative manager tempered with tradition. The administrative duties of the SAFD were divided into three functional divisions under the direction of Division Chiefs. The reassignment of departmental priorities with emphasis on personal appearance, a return to the traditional red apparatus, a high level of apparatus maintenance, and a personal pride in station appearance provided a much needed boost to department morale. Furthermore, a physical fitness program, starting with complete medical examinations including stress EKG's, was implemented on a mandatory basis on September 1, 1980.

In May 1980, all the SAFD administrative offices were again under one roof at the new facility at 1439 South Broadway. This was the first time in eight years that all staff departments were housed in one location. This move provided increased coordination and continuity in the overall operation of the SAFD.

Facing limited budgets, Chief Reimer proposed and implemented a Reserve Firefighter Program to augment the existing three member engine and truck companies. The first Reserve Academy of forty recruits graduated in October 1981. Between 1981 and 1984 the Reserve Academy

graduated more than two hundred State-certified Firefighter I trainees. More than seventy-five of the graduates, including four women, were hired by the SAFD, with a high percentage of the remaining graduates finding employment with other Southern California fire departments.

Friends in Residential Emergencies (FIRE) were a program approved by the City Council to train more than one thousand Santa Ana residents to protect themselves in fire or medical related emergencies. The program was designed to work in conjunction with Community Oriented Policing (COP) program run by the Police Department. Residents were trained in CPR, first aid, and other emergency self-help skills.

In May 1982, the Insurance Services Office (ISO) evaluated the City of Santa Ana and the SAFD. As a result of that "grading", the City and the SAFD were both judged to be Class I. Santa Ana had become the third city in the United States, and the first city west of the Mississippi River, to achieve that prestigious recognition. The celebration of the SAFD's success continued the following year with its centennial anniversary (November 1883 to November 1983). A Centennial Parade was held and apparatus was on display for the citizens. Fire protection during the parade and display was provided by neighboring cities.

Hazardous Materials, the fire service issue of the 1980's, came to Santa Ana in 1984 with the organization of a Hazardous Materials Response Team. Since inception, the SAFD has continuously staffed a Level I Response Team. Also in 1984, newly appointed City Manager Robert Bobb proposed the "privatization" of the SAFD's Paramedic Program. Both the citizens of Santa Ana and the Firemen's Benevolent Association bitterly opposed the plan, and in August the City Council, bowing to public opinion, voted down the proposition. As a result of the privatization efforts, approximately twenty firefighter/paramedics resigned from the SAFD, and were subsequently hired by other local departments.

Redevelopment of the area surrounding Station No. 9, located at Grand and Dyer, and the condemnation of the training tower, caused the closure of Fire Station No. 9. Fire companies were relocated to Stations No. 4 and No. 6. The City Council, citing the SAFD's increased response times to the area that had been covered by Station No. 9, approved \$287,000 to buy land from Southern California Edison Company for construction of a replacement Station No. 9.

In early 1986, Chief Reimer left the SAFD due to industrial illness and Deputy Fire Chief Ernest Hoefl became Acting Fire Chief. Raymond C. Davis, previously Chief of Police, was elevated to the position of Deputy City Manager of Public Safety, responsible for oversight of both the Police and Fire Departments. Later that year, David Ream became Santa Ana's third City Manager of the decade. Under his leadership, a more traditional management organization was implemented. The positions of Deputy City Managers were eliminated.

On February 23, 1987, Allen R. Carter was appointed the City's 12th Fire Chief after a nationwide recruiting effort. "Bud" Carter was a career firefighter with the City of Long Beach who had attained the rank of Deputy Chief before coming to Santa Ana. Chief Carter rapidly identified the following three areas as the "target" areas for departmental improvement:

1. The need for new apparatus to replace aging and worn engines and trucks, and an improved long term maintenance program for apparatus and the fire station infrastructure;
2. The need for a solidified plan for training and a permanent facility at which to train;
3. The need to increase staffing levels.

In response to deficiencies noted, Chief Carter rebuilt Station #9 at 1320 E. Warner Street. It was a state-of-the-art fire station and was nicknamed the Taj Mahal. The Training Facility at North Net was leased for company evolutions. The training staff was housed in a leased building at 1417 S. Broadway, which boasted state-of-the-art, interactive audio-visual capabilities that increased station training by sixty percent. On-duty staffing levels increased significantly, providing four firefighters on all apparatus. Conversion of paramedics to firefighter/paramedics was begun in 1988.

Chief Carter was officially "welcomed" to Santa Ana in May 1988, when a greater alarm fire at 4th and French Streets raged at an apartment complex under construction. The blaze ultimately required the commitment of all of Santa Ana's apparatus and fifteen mutual aid companies from neighboring jurisdictions. Damage estimates reached \$7 million, which is the largest dollar loss fire to date in Santa Ana. The fire was believed to have been started by a plumber's soldering torch.

In an effort to provide adequate resources to each request for emergency service, a telephone triage system was developed for medical incidents. Patterned after a system that was pioneered in Salt Lake, a complete Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) program was implemented in 1989. Overcrowding of residential occupancies became a serious issue in Santa Ana following a thirteen month period, from December, 1991 to January, 1993, when the SAFD experienced nine fire deaths and ten fire injuries, all occurring in only four residential fires. The number of occupants who were displaced from these four residences totaled seventy-nine. Consequently, fire tests in overcrowded conditions were conducted. There was participation by the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. Videos and test reports of the fire tests were widely distributed to gain support for Senate Bill 1477, Occupancy Standard Proposal (Bergeson) presented on February 14, 1994. Hispanic community leaders called for a probe of possible misrepresentations by city officials in their campaign for strict occupancy limits. Despite Chief Carter's best efforts, supported by the Planning and Building Agency, and the City Council, Santa Ana's efforts to reduce the occupancy limits allowed under the Uniform Housing Code were unsuccessful.

Chief Carter retired in 1995 and Marc Martin came aboard. Fire Chief Marc Martin came to Santa Ana in July 1995 from the Fullerton Fire Department. During Chief Martin's Fullerton tenure he had served as Firefighter, Paramedic, Engineer, Captain, Battalion Chief, Paramedic Coordinator, Fire Marshal and Operations Chief, being appointed Chief of the Fullerton Fire Department in 1992. Chief Martin quickly set about the process of joining the computer age. The SAFD had always provided fire-dispatching services but the process was not previously automated. Since then, computer applications were acquired to provide dispatching, records-management, personnel staffing, and payroll management. A citywide area network was established and plans made to integrate the use of GPS systems to track and dispatch emergency apparatus. In 1998, a 1921 Seagrave engine was restored by the firefighters, with assistance from local businesses, and the SAFD Museum was begun. On December 20, 1999, the SAFD Museum was officially opened at Station No. 5. Another goal for the SAFD was improved communications within the department. Chief Martin was committed to team-oriented management and formed an Agency Advisory Team (AAT) in May 1996. The team comprised of seventeen members with representatives from each rank and division in the SAFD. The Santa Ana Firemen's Benevolent Association was a full partner in the genesis of this team. After conducting a department-wide survey, twenty quality improvement opportunities were identified.

The AAT met twice a month to review on-going projects and to hear presentations from committees. All SAFD employees were encouraged to bring items before the AAT and to sit in on AAT meetings. By May 1999, the AAT was able to reduce its meetings to once each month to seek out new improvement opportunities.

The SAFD had a long history of innovation and experimentation. Many attempted improvements are long forgotten but the positive changes generated by the willingness to take a chance made the department much stronger. It wasn't always fun but the results of that experience were the foundation upon which a successful future was based. This evolutionary process was most evident in the provision of emergency medical services. The SAFD delivered advanced emergency medical service since the early 1970's using a wide variety of delivery models and personnel.

2/26/01