

# Tucson Fire Department

## Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: 1900-1915



**Al Ring**

**Bob Ring**

## TFD: Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: 1900-1915

**The TFD transitioned from an all-volunteer force to a fully paid department; had an Assistant Chief assassinated; experienced the heroic death of a retired, larger-than-life former Chief; and began the era of gasoline-powered firefighting apparatus.**

The first 15 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of significant growth, municipal improvements, and important milestones in Tucson. The biggest deal of course was Arizona becoming the 48<sup>th</sup> U.S. state in 1912. Let's talk about what was going on in Tucson before getting into the story of the important transitions of the Tucson Fire Department (TFD).

### Tucson Perspective

**Healthcare.** As Tucson historian Thomas Sheridan has noted, "During the nineteenth century, respiratory ailments increased dramatically in the overcrowded cities of industrial America. The biggest killer was tuberculosis." Beginning with the completion of the Southern Pacific transcontinental railroad through Arizona in 1883, "out-of-staters" had access to Tucson for the first time. Tubercular patients were attracted to our sunny, warm, dry weather and came to Tucson in droves in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those with money were treated at St. Mary's hospital, Whitwell Hospital that opened in 1906 at Adams and Euclid, or a handful of smaller sanatoriums. Hundreds of health seekers without financial resources began their "cures" living in a ramshackle settlement of tents and open huts, spreading across almost a square mile of barren desert, extending three-quarters of a mile north of Speedway. One resident described the isolated area, "It was a place of squalor shunned by most citizens."

Sheridan also talked about the impact of improved accommodations for patients, "Long after [tent towns] disappeared, hospitals and sanitariums erected to care for people with lung problems became the foundation of institutionalized health care in Arizona." Surviving patients remained in Arizona "to found businesses and raise families ... There was health - and money - in sunshine."



*Whitwell Hospital opened in 1906 at the northeast edge of town to serve tuberculosis patients. (Postcard courtesy of Al Ring)*

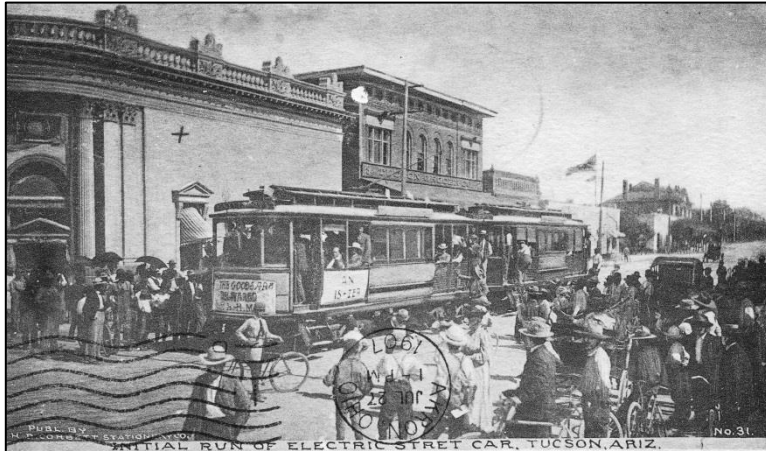
**Municipal Improvements.** The start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw many changes in the Tucson community that improved the life of its citizens:

1900 - Tucson's Water and Sewerage Department was created in August. The first sanitary sewers were installed to service downtown Tucson and surrounding residential areas. At first, sewage was conveyed via an open ditch to a small farm about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile northwest of the business district. Due to odor and

capacity issues, improvements were made in 1914 to carry sewage in a closed concrete sewer line to a new farm 4 ½ miles northwest of town.

1900 - The transition from gas to electric street lighting continued through the first decade of the new century.

1906 - The mule-driven streetcar system that connected downtown with the University of Arizona was electrified.



*The first run of Tucson's electric streetcar was in 1906. (Postcard courtesy of Al Ring)*

1907 - Tucsonans passed bond issues to improve the fire department and upgrade the water system. (See below.)

1910 - A new railroad line was completed between Tucson and Nogales that directly connected Tucson with important trade centers in Mexico.

1911 - Paving Tucson's streets began on Stone Avenue. For years only the main downtown streets were paved.

About the time paving started in the city, Speedway and Broadway Boulevards were extended seven miles to the east as graded dirt roads to connect with what would eventually be Wilmot Road.

**Milestones.** Several milestones occurred in this period that affected recreation opportunities for Tucsonans, portended future municipal developments, or provided snapshots of some of the day's social issues:

1902 - Sabino and Bear Canyons, and Mount Lemmon were included in the Santa Catalina Forest Preserve designated by President Theodore Roosevelt. They would later become part of the Coronado National Forest.

1905 - Tucson's first golf course opened - a primitive nine-hole dirt course sprayed with oil to make it smoother - at the original Tucson Country Club at Campbell Avenue and Speedway Boulevard. The first grass golf course in Tucson would not open until 1929 as the El Rio Country Club.

1910 - The first airplane flew into Tucson and demonstrated maneuvers to excited crowds. As Tucson historian C. L. Sonnichsen put it, "opened the door to the Air Age."

1912 - Arizona became the 48<sup>th</sup> U.S. state. (See below.)

1912 - Arizona voters approved women's suffrage, eight years before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920.



*Paving Congress Street in 1912. Looking east from intersection of Congress and Scott. Kitt's Sons Department Store on northeast corner of Congress and Scott suffered a fire in 1911 and has been restored. Kress Building next door will suffer a major fire in 1914. (Courtesy of <http://downtowntucson.org/2012/05/if-antiques-you-see-try-downtown-chic/>)*

1913 - The first segregated school opened in Tucson in one room at Sixth Street and Sixth Avenue.

1914 - The University of Arizona adopted the nickname "Wildcats" following a spirited football game with Occidental College.

1915 - Arizona voters approved a ban on alcohol sales and consumption, five years before the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Prohibition) to the U.S. Constitution in 1920.

**Statehood.** Ending more than 50 years as a U.S. Territory, Arizona finally became a state when President William Howard Taft signed the statehood bill on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1912. For decades, members of the U.S. Congress considered that there were too few people in the Southwestern desert, that the people were uneducated and poor, and were further bothered by the proportionally large numbers of Mexicans and Native Americans. There were also political issues as Congress was leery of admitting a state with likely two additional Democratic senators. After considerable wrangling of "jointure," the idea of admitting New Mexico and Arizona to the Union as a single state, the final holdup was resolving a few issues with Arizona's new constitution.

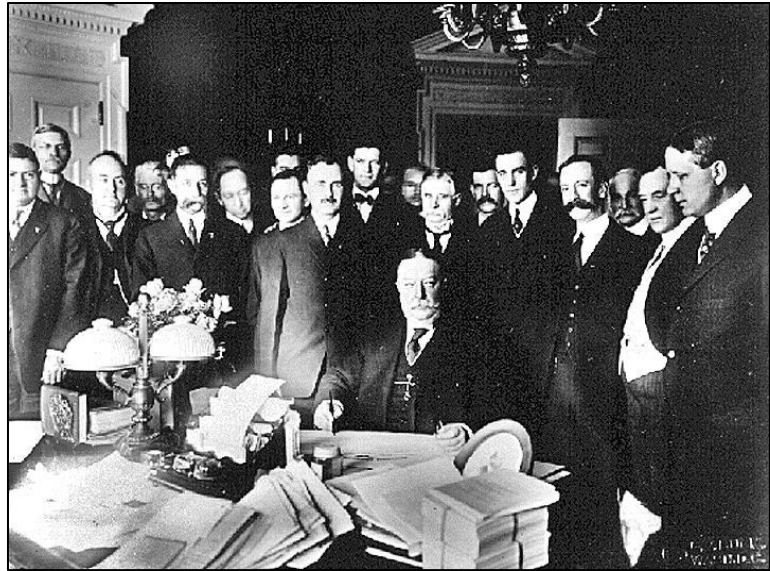
Tucson's immediate response to statehood was rather subdued. Bells and whistles did ring across town and a celebratory gathering was held at the UA with speeches and a cadet parade. The *Tucson Citizen* reported optimistically, "Now that statehood is a reality, Arizona, whose progress has been rapid, should go forward by leaps and bounds."

**Population.** Tucson had survived the economic depression of the 1890s, recovered its 1880 population by the year 1900, and then began a steady growth period. By 1915 Tucson's population was an estimated 17,000 persons, more than double the 1900 population of just over 7,500. The percentage of Anglos compared to Hispanics also continued to grow during this period - reaching 55% from 47% while the Hispanic population portion dropped from 47% to 40%.

For decades Tucsonans had believed that they lived in the largest city in Arizona; indeed as Tucson historian David Devine tells us, "local boosters had pointed with enormous pride" in comparisons to Phoenix, that Tucson had been the "metropolis of Arizona for more than fifty years." But the official U.S. Census of 1920 would show that between 1910 and 1920, the population of Phoenix had grown so quickly as to surpass Tucson's - 29,053 to 20,292.<sup>1</sup>

**City Development.** Tucson was expanding. By 1915 urban development had reached Speedway Boulevard to the north, 22<sup>nd</sup> Street to the south, Campbell Avenue to the east, and the Santa Cruz River to the west. Historian Sonnichsen provides a snapshot of progress,

"The face of the town was changing slowly but steadily, new house following house as streets and subdivisions opened up in the eastward expansion of the community. The area between downtown and the university was filling in, and a fine residential district was opening southeast of the business section, while Main Street and nearby Paseo Redondo continued to attract the well healed. East Congress continued to develop as a commercial street."



*President William Howard Taft signed the bill that made Arizona the 48<sup>th</sup> state on February 14, 1912. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)*

---

<sup>1</sup> If you "plot" the populations of Tucson and Phoenix using U.S. Census numbers every ten years you can determine that the crossover point, the first year that Phoenix's population exceeded Tucson's, was 1912, the year that Arizona became a state.

Besides the Whitwell Hospital, two other new buildings of note were completed during this period. The five-story Santa Rita Hotel - with 200 rooms, and an elevator to a roof-top garden - opened in 1904 at the corner of Broadway and Scott.<sup>2</sup> The Southern Pacific Railroad built a new brick Spanish Revival Style railroad depot in 1907 to replace the original wooden depot on the same site.<sup>3</sup> The new building was required because passenger and freight traffic outgrew the old building.



*It took two years to build the Santa Rita Hotel that opened in 1904. (Postcard courtesy of Al Ring)*



*The new Southern Pacific Railroad Depot opened in 1907. (Postcard courtesy of Al Ring)*

### **Tucson Fire Department**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century began, Tucson was growing steadily and the TFD needed to grow and change with the community. Tucson voters supported a bond issue in 1907 that enabled the construction of a replacement fire station and the purchase of new alarm systems and firefighting equipment. A second bond issue passed in 1915 would provide funds for Tucson's second fire station in 1917. Meanwhile the TFD was undergoing significant changes.

**Paid Fire Department.** The TFD began its transition from an all-volunteer department to a fully-paid organization in 1900 when the first paid firefighter was hired. A second paid firefighter was added in 1903, three more in 1909 when the new fire station was completed, and another two in 1911. During this period of gradual transition, the TFD was operating as a "combination department," i.e. a combination of part-time volunteer and paid full-time firefighters. The *Tucson Daily Citizen* supported this transition by arguing that, "We should have a proper fire department with ... paid firemen on duty at all times, ready to respond without an instant's delay to an alarm." In 1915 the volunteer department voted to disband and was fully supplanted by the all-paid TFD. (More to come on volunteer firefighters)

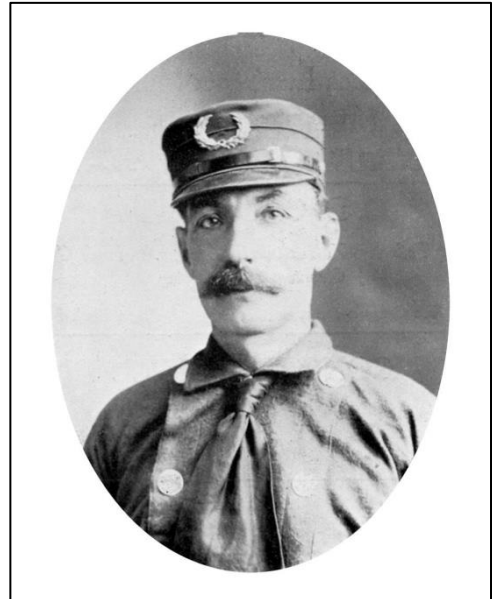
---

<sup>2</sup> A six-story addition was made to the hotel in 1917. The original hotel was demolished in 1972 except for this addition. The final entire demolition occurred in 2009 to make way for a new Tucson Electric Power Corporate Headquarters.

<sup>3</sup> The station was enlarged and modernized in 1941, sold to the city of Tucson in 1998 and renovated to the 1941 period in 2004, and now offers office, restaurant, and retail space in addition to its rail functions. Since 2005 the station has also been the home of the Southern Arizona Transportation Museum.

There was a transition going on in the management of the TFD too. Between 1900 and 1910, six different men served as volunteer Chief of the TFD: Frank E. Russell (1898-1903 and 1905-1906), hardware store owner; George Kendall Smith (1903-1904), tailor; Henry Melliush (1904-1905), optician; George P. Scholefield (1906-1908), cattle inspector; Sam Y. Barkley (1908-1910), hay and grain company owner; and Frank W. Ganz (1909-1915), plumbing business owner. (More to come on volunteer Chiefs)

Probably thinking that a city of Tucson's size required a full-time paid fire department, in 1910 the Mayor and Common Council passed Ordinance 326 which provided for a paid Fire Marshal to "have entire charge of the Fire Department." Thomas Conlon, Water Works Superintendent, was appointed to this position amid protests from the volunteer firefighters who thought that things were "just fine" the way they were. The Fire Marshal job quickly evolved into a paid Fire Chief position; thus Conlon became the first paid Chief of the TFD. In early 1911 Harry J. Parker, TFD Driver, took over as the second paid Chief and served for ten years.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps to assuage hurt feelings, between 1911 and 1915 when the volunteer organization disbanded, the TFD retained Frank W. Ganz as volunteer Chief, and for that period, the TFD actually had two Chiefs.



*Thomas Conlon served as the TFD's first paid Chief in 1911. (Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society B12 351)*

**Firefighters.** TFD records reveal that the average size of the TFD during this period was about 65 members, with Hispanic representation around 20%. Hispanic members also began to serve as Foremen of the Chemical, Hose, and Hook & Ladder Companies.

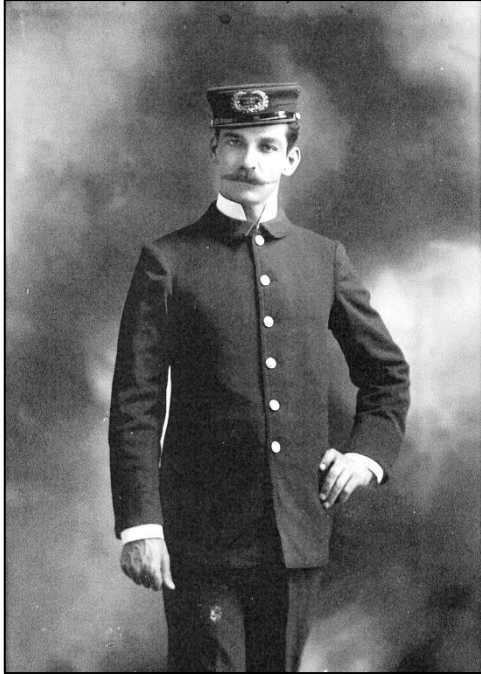
In 1906 the paid firefighters began keeping detailed records of every fire that the TFD fought. This was the start of a "more systemized" TFD that over the years would yield an extraordinary data base of lessons learned and historical documentation.

Well known Tucsonans continued to support the TFD as an important element of the city infrastructure. In 1907 Mose Drachman, prominent Tucson businessman and politician, served on the Fire Committee, a subgroup of the Common Council that oversaw TFD operations.

During this period the TFD suffered two tragedies that resulted in the deaths of two of its most prominent firefighters. In 1902 William H. Katzenstein, then Assistant Chief of the TFD and a full-time police officer, was shot and killed while opening a fire hydrant on the corner of Broadway and Meyer to help fight a fire. His Mexican assailant shot Katzenstein five times, killing him instantly, in revenge for a friend who had been arrested by Officer Katzenstein.

---

<sup>4</sup> This was the start of a trend of much longer terms for TFD Chiefs, instead of the typical 1-2 years of service for most previous Chiefs.



*Police officer and Assistant TFD Chief William Katzenstein was assassinated in 1902. (Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society B5571)*

In 1910 Jack Boleyn, former Chief of the TFD for over ten years, then retired but still volunteering his services, died of injuries suffered in fighting a fire at Goldring's Furniture Store. Boleyn was working inside the building when part of the roof fell in and a heavy timber struck him across his stomach, causing internal injuries. At the same time a large quantity of boiling water from a rooftop tank fell with the roof, scalding Boleyn from the waist down. Boleyn died from his injuries the next day. (More on Jack Boleyn to come)

**New Fire Station.** By 1907 Tucson's only fire station, TFD Station 1 at 111 N. Church Street, was falling apart. The *Tucson Daily Citizen* reported,

"The engine house is in a dangerous condition and liable to collapse. For some time the structure has appeared decidedly shaky and City Engineer Wright was instructed to make an examination of the building. He condemned the structure as very dangerous."

The 1907 bond issue, that included funds to improve the fire department, was just in time to build a new fire station to replace the deteriorating original adobe structure. The bond funding plan was approved by the U.S. Congress (a requirement for a U.S. Territory) in early 1908 and the search for a site to build the station commenced. Finally in January 1909, after many months of argument and political turmoil - including public petitions and protests over one choice or another, a site was agreed to at 142 South 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just a few blocks east of the old station.

The new fire station was designed quickly and a two-story brick building was completed on June 21, 1909 - the *Tucson Daily Citizen* quickly dubbed it, "most modern in the Southwest."

By June 22<sup>nd</sup> all the firefighting equipment had been moved from the old building into the new station.<sup>5</sup> Also, the original alarm bell, that had first been hung in a bell tower in Church Plaza in 1881 and then moved to TFD Station 1 on Church Street in 1883, was moved to the new TFD Station 1 on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

The old TFD Station 1 was completely demolished in December 1909.

**Replacement Fire Alarm Boxes.** By 1900 the fire alarm boxes installed in the downtown area in 1881 were "antiquated" and in need of replacement. Progress was slow and complaints were many. In 1904 the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, reporting about a fire on Church Street, noted about the late alarm, "... another

---

<sup>5</sup> This building became known as Central Station and was the home of downtown fire units for 63 years until a new Fire Headquarters was completed in 1972 at 265 South Church Avenue. In 2009 Station 1 moved to its current quarters within the Fire Central Building at 300 South Fire Central Place.



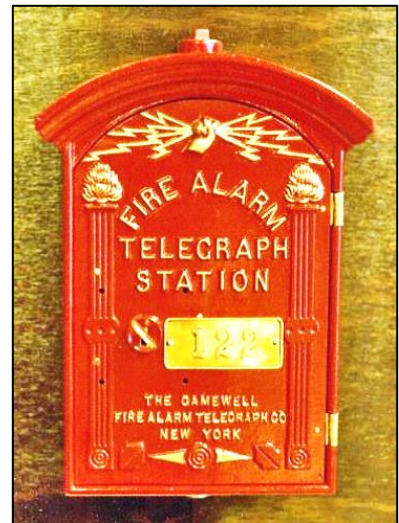


*The new two-story brick fire station opened in June 1909 at 142 South 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The firefighting apparatus is displayed out front. (Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society 42889)*

illustration of how badly Tucson needs an up to date fire alarm system.” In 1906 the TFD petitioned the Common Council for new alarms with an insightful description of the problem,

“The TFD responds as quickly as any in Arizona or N.M. As soon as the alarm reaches the engine house it starts a buzzer going, the horses are released from their stalls, they run to their places, the harnesses drop and the fire dept. is on its way. The great trouble, however, is with the method of call up [to] the fire engine house and notifying them of a fire. It very often happens that there is no telephone in the house in which a fire starts. It is necessary then to run out and find a phone before the alarm can be given. It would be even worse should a fire break out late at night when everyone has retired. Should a passerby discover the fire, he would be unable to give an alarm until he finally came to a house where there is a telephone.”

The bond issue of 1907 provided funds to purchase a new fire alarm system. Twenty four Gamewell alarm boxes were purchased and installed around town along with supporting electronic equipment by June 22, 1909 - in concert with the completion of the new fire station. The locations of the new alarm boxes and instructions to use them



*Restored Gamewell fire alarm box, introduced in Tucson in 1909. (Courtesy of the TFD)*

were published in the local papers and in a souvenir pamphlet provided to the public at the opening of the fire station,

“To turn in an alarm from a fire alarm box, break the glass, turn the key and open the door. You will find a hook inside; pull down strong and let it go quick. That is all that is necessary.”

This fire alarm system provided efficient service well into the 1920s.<sup>6</sup>

**Additional Firefighting Equipment.** The period of horse-drawn firefighting apparatus began in Tucson in 1900 when the city purchased four horses and special harnesses to pull the existing (previously firefighter-pulled) hook & ladder and chemical engine wagons - with the two hose carts frequently hooked behind the wagons. Between 1900 and 1915 Tucson purchased two other sets of firefighting apparatus that were drawn by (additional) horses. Then in 1914 Tucson started a transition to gasoline-powered equipment. Horse-drawn equipment operations continued to 1917.



*This hose wagon started service in September 1903. (Courtesy of the TFD)*

In September 1903 the TFD purchased a horse-drawn hose wagon.<sup>7</sup> The apparatus was equipped with axes, picks, one 24-foot extension ladder, and one 12-foot roof ladder. The hose capacity was 1,500 feet of 2 ½ inch double jacket hose.

The successful 1907 bond issue provided Tucson with funds to buy the most significant piece of firefighting apparatus that the city had purchased so far, a steam pumper called the Nott Steamer, pulled by three horses. Made by the W. S. Nott Company in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the fire

engine weighed 7,000 pounds, was 8 2/3 feet high, 24 feet long, and 5 feet wide. When the Steamer was on a fire run, a coal fire, started by kindling in a firebox below the boiler, produced steam that enabled the machine to pump 600 gallons of water per minute through its two 2 1/2-inch hoses, after being attached to a fire hydrant.

<sup>6</sup> Tucson's Gamewell alarm boxes were manufactured in 1901 and apparently purchased second hand. A surviving alarm box was restored to working order in 1977 and is currently on display with other historic alarm boxes at Fire Central.

<sup>7</sup> The hose wagon apparatus was restored and is currently on display at the Rodeo Parade Museum.



*It took three horses to pull the 7,000-pound Nott Steamer.  
(Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society 44620)*

The Nott Steamer arrived in Tucson in August 1908 but was not put into service until April 1909 because three horses had to be secured and trained, the TFD had to make tests and practice runs, and a gas heater had to be procured to keep the steam-producing water at the boiling point while the Steamer was garaged - to be instantly ready once an alarm sounded. After the Steamer became operational, it was so efficient that fire insurance rates went down 40%. Affectionately named the "Jack Boleyn," honoring the former TFD Chief, the Nott Steamer was Tucson's

primary fire apparatus until 1914 when the motorized era of firefighting began.<sup>8</sup> (More on Nott Steamer to come)

It was Tucson's growth that brought the horse-drawn era of firefighting to an end. In 1914 the City Administration recognized that in order to provide timely fire protection for outlying districts in the north and south, a motorized fire truck was required (or more costly, multiple fire substations). Also, as the *Tucson Daily Citizen* reported, the existing chemical engine was "somewhat decrepit" at 25 years old, "the fire horses are getting old and it would soon become necessary to purchase" replacements, and "a new hose wagon is needed."

So in June 1914 Tucson purchased its first motorized fire truck, a hand-cranked, four cylinder Velie combination chemical and hose apparatus. The vehicle had seats for ten firefighters and carried 1,500 feet of 2 ½-inch hose, fire-suppressant chemicals, two 24-foot extension ladders, one 14-foot roof ladder, two fire axes, and four fire extinguishers.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 12 horses (total) that pulled the fire apparatus, seven were now retired. Two horses were kept to pull the chemical wagon and three horses were retained to pull the Steamer - serving the TFD until 1917. (More on our four-footed friends to come)

**Availability of Water.** Because of dissatisfaction with service - inadequate water supply and frequent low water pressure, in 1900 Tucson purchased the private Tucson Water Company and was officially in

---

<sup>8</sup> The Nott Steamer was used until 1917 and then retired. The Steamer spent many years on loan to the Arizona Historical Society and was eventually transferred back to the city, where beginning in 1983, a 4 ½-year, 5,000 man-hour TFD effort fully restored the Steamer to working order in 1988. The Nott Steamer is currently on display at Fire Central.

<sup>9</sup> The Velie firetruck served until 1925 when it was converted into a city garbage truck.

the public water business. The new Tucson Water and Sewerage Department took over operation of the existing water pumping station and well at 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Osborne Avenue, designated as Plant 1.

Water shortage continued to be a problem. A prolonged draught in the early 1900s made things worse. Tucson restricted use of water for plants and landscaping; irrigation was allowed only between five and eight o'clock in the morning. But these measures were inadequate.

Water system improvement funds from the 1907 bond issue became available in early 1908 to provide water service to the area between

downtown and the University of Arizona. The city also purchased a pump and two steam boilers to draw and distribute water from a new well drilled at the old gravity-feed water collection area south of town along the Santa Cruz River. This expenditure created Plant 2 at Irvington Road and the Santa Cruz River - a location closer to the source of the water. According to water historian Douglas Kupel, "Plant 2 developed into a productive well field for the City of Tucson as urban growth expanded to surround the plant."

The water delivery system was increasing rapidly from its size in 1900. By 1909 the number of fire hydrants had increased from 62 to 296, and the total length of water mains had increased from 15 to 42 miles.

Low water pressure was a persistent problem. At peak water usage times, between four and eight o'clock in the evening, water streams from TFD hoses were incapable of reaching the top of tall buildings. Additional funds from a 1913 bond issue enabled Tucson to buy new pumps at both water plants.

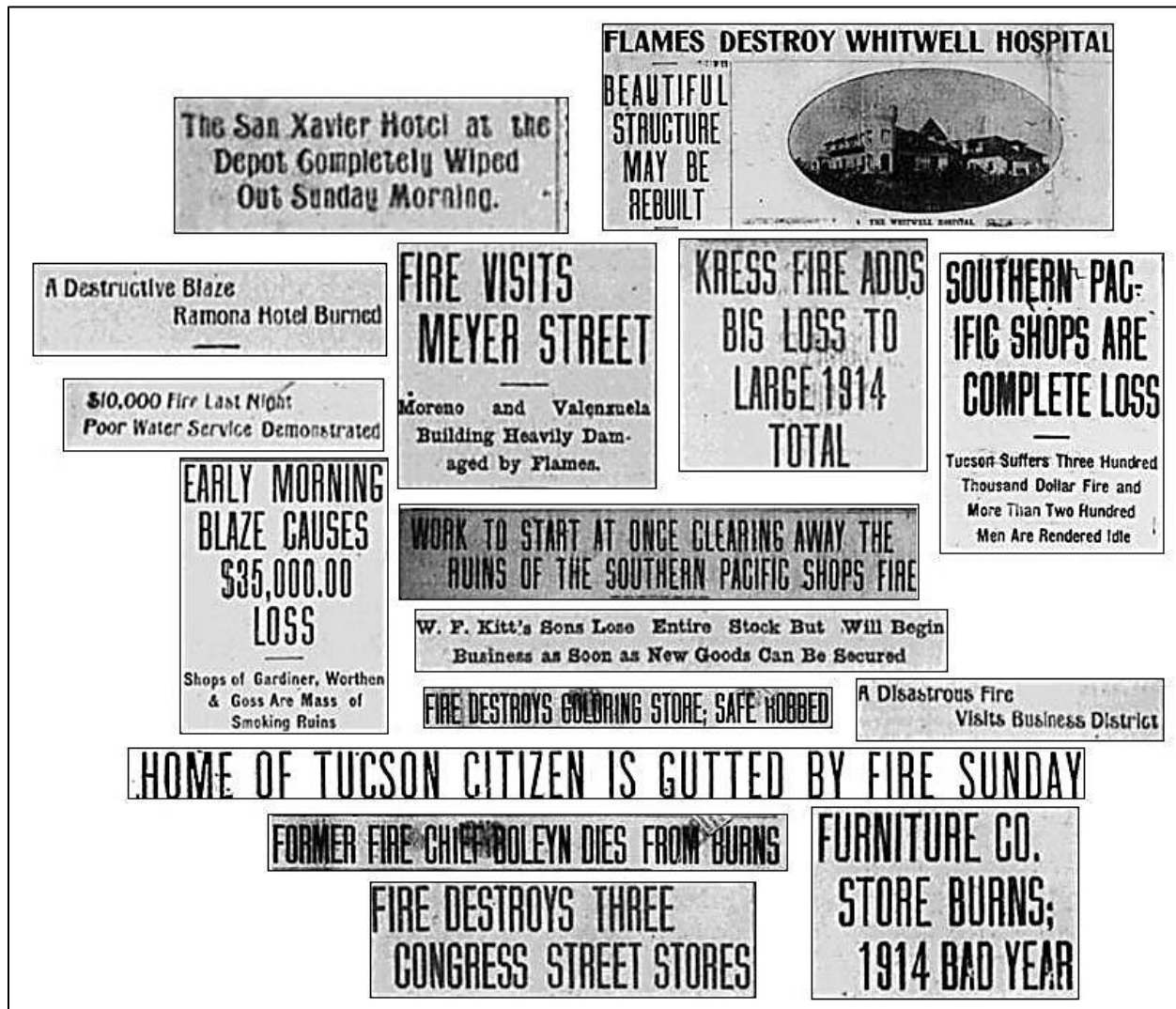
Meanwhile, collection and storage of water for public use and emergencies had become a priority. TFD records mention that, "In 1907, the city water supply included a bright red and gold fire water tank at Fourth Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street." With funds from the 1913 bond issue, in 1914 Tucson constructed a 1.5-million gallon reservoir at Plant 1 and a major pipeline to deliver water to city mains. The reinforced concrete reservoir, with corrugated metal roof, had an inside diameter of 150 feet with a uniform water depth of twelve feet, six inches. In 1915 the City built another reservoir at Campbell Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.



*Tucson's gasoline-powered Velie fire truck started service in 1914.  
(Courtesy of the TFD)*

In the next five years, Tucson would build two more reservoirs, dig six more wells at Plant 2, and begin to decentralize its water system, leading to digging ground wells all over town.

**Major Fires.** From 1900 through 1915, there were over twenty major fires in Tucson. As during the previous 20 years, most of these fires occurred in the more crowded, commercial, downtown area - particularly on Congress Street and near the Southern Pacific Railroad Depot.<sup>10</sup> Here are summaries of a representative group of these fires, compiled from TFD records and newspaper accounts of the day. Comments in "quotes" are from newspapers.



Here are some representative newspaper headlines for the fires that occurred from 1900 to 1915. (Courtesy of the Arizona Weekly Star, Arizona Weekly Citizen, Tucson Daily Citizen)

<sup>10</sup> From 1911-1915, there were four major fires on the same block of East Congress, between Scott and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In 1912 and 1913 there were two additional major fires on East Congress, only a block to the west, between Scott and Stone. Strangely all six of these fires were on the north side of the street.

Horse-drawn: Hook & Ladder Wagon, Chemical Wagon, and Two Hose Carts Available - August 1900

**January 26, 1903      Red Light District on West Congress**

Four buildings completely destroyed: stock seller, bakery, tailor shop, and barber shop. “The line of hose had been hastily laid and the chemical was brought into service. The heat was intense and yet the firemen held their ground [and] after two hours of fighting the fire was gotten under control. ... Several of the boys just escaped from under a falling board awning which the flames had released.”



*Looking west along Congress Street towards Tucson's Red Light District c. 1900. The center area, called the Wedge, was condemned and leveled in 1907. (Courtesy of Henry Buehman)*

**June 28, 1903      San Xavier Hotel at Southern Pacific Depot**

Hotel owned by Southern Pacific Railroad completely destroyed. Fire department had protective streams of water on nearby Southern Pacific Company dwelling and office buildings. After-fire requests from TFD to Common Council included “1,500 feet of hose and three water jackets to cover breaks in hose.” Councilman stated that “the best citizens would support the installation of an up-to-date alarm system.”



*The San Xavier Hotel along the railroad tracks at the Southern Pacific Depot - before the fire.  
(Courtesy of the Jewish History Museum)*

Horse-drawn: Hose Wagon Added to Apparatus - September 1903

**May 10, 1904      Romona Hotel & Braggs Barber Shop on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

Fire completely “wiped out” Braggs Barber Shop. “Before the Tucson fire department could get water, the fire crossed a private alley ... and immediately swept through the upper story [of the Romona Hotel]. ... Fully two hours elapsed before the fire was extinguished.” Good water pressure. Next day TFD said the Romona Hotel could have been saved if Tucson had an adequate fire alarm system.

**December 5, 1904      Warehouse South of Southern Pacific Depot**

Railroad warehouse full of combustibles like gasoline and kerosene. Building went up quickly and “the heat was something terrific, the flames shooting up to an appalling height” that could be seen from San Xavier Mission. Very low water pressure for TFD; concentrated on saving other nearby buildings. *Tucson Daily Citizen* reported impassioned plea from TFD spokesman, “What we need is either a steamer or a reservoir somewhere whereby the proper pressure can be brought forth. Why, if we had had that last night, the oil would not have had a chance to get on fire ... As is was, a miserable little stream was all we could get and it was virtually useless.”

**November 11, 1907      Shops of Gardiner, Worthen & Goss at Eastern Head of Congress**

Foundry plant, opposite new Southern Pacific Depot, completely destroyed. Fire probably originated from gas heater in building. “Reported delay of the fire department in reaching the scene of the fire.” Firemen arrived to find building engulfed; attached two hose lines to nearby hydrants; “excellent” water pressure. Focused on saving adjoining buildings, Tucson Lumber Yard, and railroad depot.

**December 30, 1908    Whitwell Hospital at Adams and Euclid**

Pipeline and hydrant placement completed morning of fire (paid for by owner of Hospital). Slowly developing fire; probably started from chimney spark. Ten patients safely removed. "Hose wagon and chemical answered the call ... two lines of hose were speedily laid and played on the burning building. ... almost the entire second story was mass of flames ... but water had little effect on the flames and building was slowly destroyed. ... firemen showed considerable courage in mounting to the second floor ... fortunately no accidents occurred." Nott Steamer could have helped on fire, but new apparatus not available because there were no horses to pull it. Hospital owner appealed to Common Council for refund of "protection" pipeline/hydrant cost.

Horse-drawn: Nott Steamer Available - April 1909

**April 29, 1909                    Moreno and Valenzuela Building on Meyer**

Heavy damage to two-story building that contained a saloon. "All of the fire apparatus was called out and the steamer was ready for operation as soon as the hose connections could be made." Heavy water pressure in that area. "Firemen ... were doing good work." On steamer run to fire, "the right horse of the fire engine trio stumbled and fell. ... The fallen horse was unhitched and then quickly hitched up again and the run resumed. The horse was not badly hurt."

**September 30, 1910    Southern Pacific Railroad Shops**

Wood-framed buildings. Fire started in blacksmith shop, spread to "machine shop, pipe fitting department, the boilermaking quarters, 25-stall roundhouse, ten engines including one brand new engine, 19 tenders, and all the equipment, tools and materials located in the shops. ... total loss ... catastrophic disaster ... The city fire department and the Southern Pacific fire fighters struggled valiantly against the flames but their fight was hopeless." Low water pressure. Hundreds of people out of work until shops rebuilt and equipment replaced.



*The shop fire devastated company property. (Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society #PC180f187#138)*



*The roundhouse and shop facilities were rebuilt by 1912. (Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society #PC180f187\_4904)*



**November 17, 1910      Goldring Furniture Store on East Congress**

Furniture store and contents completely destroyed. Smoke damage to next door Kitt's clothing and dry goods store. "When fire department arrived, the whole building was in flames. ... difficulty in getting water from the fire hydrants." Concentrated on saving Kitt's store and rest of block. Former TFD Chief Jack Boleyn died from injuries received while fighting fire. (See above.)

**May 27, 1911              Kitt's Sons Department Store on East Congress**

Fire at W. F. Kitt's Sons dry goods and clothing store in Schrader Building. Started in basement; then "flames flashed upward" through center of store. "Complete loss ... nothing is saved ... The water pressure was so weak, because of the disability of the new pumping station, that only a small stream of water ... could be brought to bear upon the building." Follow-up *Tucson Daily Citizen* editorial praised the TFD effort "for their splendid work," and lamented that "the water pressure proved insufficient for them to do more than limit the fire to this one building."

**February 4, 1912        Tucson Citizen Plant on Belknap**

Offices of *Tucson Citizen* newspaper "gutted" and "partially destroyed ... fire started under wooden stairway outside building ... sucked through small window and spread with great rapidity ... fire department quickly got three lines of hose into action ... much difficulty ... because of live wires ... portion of roof fell in ... linotypes and big newspaper press badly damaged and most of the other equipment almost completely wrecked." Follow-up editorial extolled firefighters' "heroic work." For seven days after fire, *Citizen* used office of *Arizona Star* to print paper; by eighth day, *Citizen* printed in new plant of its own.

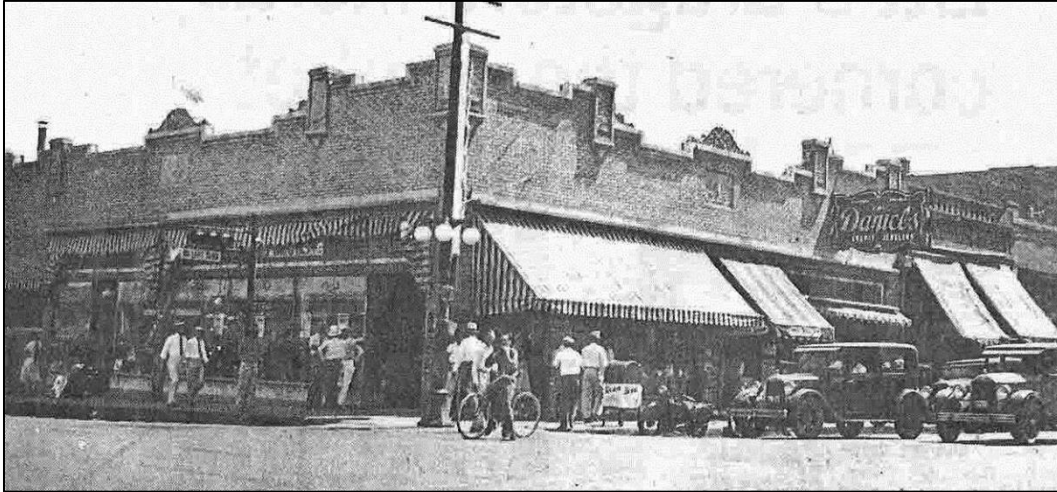
**May 9, 1912              Stationery, Meat, Candy Stores on East Congress**

Fire started in Corbett Stationery Company, spread to Fulton Meat Market and George Androus Candy Shop. Stores "completely gutted." Immediate alarm; no delay in fire department arrival. Low water pressure. "According to the statements of the firemen, the fire ... could easily have been confined ... but for lack of water." Editorial: "Time for concerted action by all business interests of Tucson to ascertain why water pressure cannot be secured when needed in cases of fire and to remedy the condition immediately, is right now." Additional follow-up editorials on need "to provide sufficient water protection for property in Tucson" by building "a large reservoir."

**January 19, 1913        Litt's Drug Store and Adjacent Buildings at Stone and Congress**

Dangerous downtown fire. Started in Litt's Drug Store; spread to roofs of adjacent Webber & Savage Co. on Stone and the Palms on Congress. "Five streams of water were played on the fire. The water pressure was good ... It burned for three hours ... Fire

Chief Parker [slightly] injured in fall from ladder ... 400 spectators” Much post-fire discussion about need for fire walls between buildings in downtown.



*Litt's Drug Store at Stone Avenue and Congress Street dominated Tucson's busiest corner.  
(Courtesy of the Arizona Daily Star)*

**June 26, 1914                      Kress Building on East Congress**

Fire started in basement, “shot up the elevator shafts to the second floor. That floor is completely gutted. ... burning for a long time before alarm came” Severe damage to building and contents. “Four lines of hose, totaling over 2,600 feet were laid. ... phenomenal [water] pressure ... to get water above the fire ... no danger of its spreading.”

Motorized: Velie Fire Truck Available - June 1914; Horse-Drawn Nott Steamer still Available

**January 1, 1915                      Tucson Furniture Company on East Congress**

Fire started in rear stockroom and followed permanent awnings around building. Loss about 50%. Velie motor truck helped apply two streams of water on fire. Driver of fire truck suffered severe cut on wrist from falling glass.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the TFD continue to protect Tucson from a widespread conflagration, mature into a fully-paid organization, lose two of its finest in the line of duty, participate in the motorized technology revolution, and constantly fight for an adequate water system.

## Primary Sources

1. *Arizona: A History* (Thomas E. Sheridan, 2012).
2. *Charter and Ordinances of the City of Tucson - Ordinance 326* (Google Books, 1983).
3. "City of Tucson Racial Proportions - 1860-2015," [tucsonaz.gov/files/hcd/data/racialpct.pdf](http://tucsonaz.gov/files/hcd/data/racialpct.pdf).
4. "The Evolutionary Development of the Sanitary Sewage System for the Greater Tucson Metropolitan Area," Jon C. Schladweiler, 2000.
5. "Extract from Mayor and Council Meetings 1882-1931 Pertaining to Fire Hydrants," Lynn D. Baker, date unknown.
6. "From Humble Beginnings - A History of the Department," Assistant Chief Dave Ridings, March 9, 2011.
7. *Fuel for Growth - Water and Arizona's Urban Environment* (Douglas E. Kupel, 2003).
8. *Historical Atlas of Arizona* (Henry P. Walker and Don Bufkin, 1986).
9. "History of the Tucson Fire Department," Tucson Fire Department, date unknown.
10. "Ointment of Love - Oliver E. Comstock and Tucson's Tent City," Dick Hall, 1978.
11. *Steam Fire Engines* (Nott Fire Engine Company Brochure, date unknown).
12. *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 1900-1915.
13. *Tucson - The Early Years* (William F. Greer, 1982).
14. *Tucson - A History of the Old Pueblo from the 1854 Gadsden Purchase* (David Devine, 2015).
15. *Tucson - The Life and Times of an American City* (C. L. Sonnichsen, 1987).
16. "Tucson Lighting, 1882-1912," Catherine Maier Orlando, 1981.
17. *Tucson Reflections - Living History from the Old Pueblo* (Bob Ring, 2015).
18. U. S. Census (1890, 1900, 1910, 1920).

# Greater Tucson Fire Foundation

## Thank you for taking an interest in Tucson Fire Department history —

This is one of many sections that contain information, documents, letters, newspaper articles, pictures, etc. They have been collected and arranged in chronological order or by a subject. These items were collected, organized and entered into a computerized database by Dave Ridings Retired Assistant Chief Tucson Fire Department, Al Ring friend of the department, Greater Tucson Fire Foundation and with the help of many friends and fellow firefighters.

All graphics have been improved to make the resolution as good as possible, but the reader should remember that many came from copies of old newspaper articles. This also applies to other items such as documents, letters, etc.

Credit to the source of the documents, photos, etc. is provided whenever it was available. We realize that many items are not identified and regret that we weren't able to provide this information. As far as the newspaper articles that are not identified, 99% of them would have to be from one of three possible sources. The *Arizona Daily Star*, The *Tucson Citizen* and the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, for which we want to give a special thanks.

Please use this information as a reference tool only. If the reader uses any of the information for any purpose other than a reference tool, they should get permission from the source.

Should the reader have additional information on the above subject we would appreciate you sharing it with us. Please see the names and contact information on the 1st. TFD Archives page right below this paragraph.

