

ON SCENE

FOR AND ABOUT THE EMPLOYEES OF THE JACKSONVILLE FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT

JULY 20 11

JFRD'S 125th ANNIVERSARY

1886-2011

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DEAR FELLOW FIREFIGHTERS

In the mid-1880s, public service and public sentiment in Jacksonville could be considered a dream come true for firefighters.

Our city's fire service was rapidly evolving from a decades-old volunteer system to an organized department. Plenty of attention centered upon forming Jacksonville's first paid fire department and ensuring that it had the necessary resources to meet the city's fire suppression demands. The enthusiasm, shared by elected officials and the public, was rooted in a number of significant fires that had ravaged Jacksonville dating back to the 1850s.

This issue of ON SCENE focuses on our department's formation 125 years ago and its development through the mid-1920s. A special tax levy helped bring the Jacksonville Fire Department to life in 1886, with Chief Engineer Peter Jones leading the organization. The department's strength included Jones' assistant engineer and a dozen permanent uniformed members.

Historical documents rave about JFD's popularity, its efficiency, and how fire protection reduced not only risk, but also insurance premiums. All of this remains true today, and we can be proud of our ongoing service to the community.

In its infancy, JFD enjoyed steady growth and had tripled its strength by the time the Great Fire of 1901 consumed 90 percent of downtown and left approximately 10,000 people homeless. When Fire Chief Thomas Haney called the general alarm that Friday afternoon in early May, he became part of what is arguably the most significant public safety event in Jacksonville's history.

Commanding and caring for his personnel, Haney exerted himself to the point of exhaustion during the Great Fire. The next day, he immediately focused upon restoring resources, like the 3,000 feet of hose that had been lost to fire, and basically ensuring that JFD had what it needed to keep doing its job.

History clearly indicates that public affection for JFD and Chief Haney remained strong despite the city's widespread destruction in 1901. Haney didn't retire until 1926, a quarter century after the Great Fire. His 33-year tenure as fire chief is the longest in our department's history, and Haney's solid reputation includes his passion for modernization as well as improving response times.

I suspect that Haney took tremendous pride in the progress of JFD, but that he also yearned for the department to continue to adapt and advance as far as possible. He wanted his department to be the best. Haney's mindset would work well in today's professional and technologically advanced era of firefighting.

Sincerely,

Dr. Charles E. Moreland
Director/Fire Chief

Cover Photo: JFD in the early 1900s. Assistant Fire Chief Archibald Singer, presumably the man seated next to the driver, poses with the crew of Hose Wagon 3. Singer helped command The Great Fire of 1901 after Fire Chief Thomas Haney succumbed to exhaustion.



Central Fire Station, circa 1913.
JFD responded to 402 calls that year, 346 were fires

The Birth of Jacksonville's Fire Department

By John Bracey

Paid Department Organized 125 Years Ago

Peter Jones didn't hesitate in asking for more.

Not even a full year into his stint as the first chief of Jacksonville's newly organized paid fire department, Jones was making his case to elected officials for more firefighters, more horses, salary increases, additional apparatus and improvements to the Gamewell Fire Alarm system. Given the city's 10¼ square miles and outlying areas, Jones wasn't satisfied with just 15 alarm boxes linked by 5 miles of wire citywide.

Jones employed the science of risk management, first referencing the city's total property value of \$283,700, then comparing it to the \$8,625 in property that had been lost to fire damages since the Jacksonville Fire Department had formed on July 16, 1886 – 125 years ago this month. The \$275,000 in undamaged property, he rationalized, was intact and safer thanks to the JFD. His argument had validation, given Jacksonville's rapid growth and a variety of recent and significant fires with six-digit losses – all of which were fought by volunteer companies. So investing in the department's growth was



JFD Chief Peter Jones

JACKSONVILLE'S FIRST CHIEF

Born in Staffordshire, England in 1832, Peter Jones was an infant when his parents immigrated to the United States. After being raised in New York City, where he would eventually serve as a policeman, Jones migrated to the South during the Civil War. He arrived in Jacksonville after the war, and he was soon appointed collector of revenue for Duval County. Jones was subsequently elected as a member of the city council, which was followed by his election as mayor of Jacksonville, a post he held for six terms.

Following his tenure as mayor, Jones was appointed United States steamboat inspector of hulls for the third district, headquartered in Savannah, a position he held until his appointment in July 1886 as chief of Jacksonville's first paid fire department. Jones was a somewhat controversial choice as fire chief, as he had been known as "The Carpet-Bagger Mayor" due to his northern ties.

Jones remained Jacksonville's fire chief until his death in 1891 from pneumonia, reportedly contracted in the line of duty. An obituary for Jones published in *The Florida Times-Union* referred to him as "a brave, resolute man, fearless and firm in the discharge of his duty." The newspaper reported that "the whole city" mourned his loss, and that Jones "had the respect and esteem of every one who knew him."

logical, Jones told the Board of Fire Commissioners, who supported, then shared the chief's recommendations with City Council.

Fire had certainly left its impression on Jacksonville in recent times. Exposures were not limited to adjacent structures; they hopped from one pinewood structure to another and were often measured in city blocks. However, during the mid- to late-1880s, the widespread and repeated fiery destruction that plagued Jacksonville created an enduring sense of vulnerability, revealed the weaknesses of volunteer firefighting companies and got the attention of insurance companies that were facing sizable claims.

In 1854, a downtown conflagration destroyed 70 structures, yielding losses estimated at \$300,000. Troops burned major portions of the city during the Civil War era. And in 1870, a mattress factory fire overwhelmed the city's volunteer firefighting contingent, which by then had organized into six distinct companies. Then came 1885, when Jacksonville's commercial district suffered another widespread fire that destroyed the post office, courthouse, a hardware store, several warehouses and numerous other establishments. Damages were estimated at \$200,000, and that fire led to another milestone: the first death of a firefighter, volunteer Henry J. Bradley. Meanwhile, insurance companies reacted to the massive losses by raising premiums, 20 to 30 percent in some cases, which upset local government and property owners.

So the time had come to elevate Jacksonville's firefighting to the next level. Elected officials supported, while merchants, residents and even the press celebrated, the organization of the Jacksonville Fire Department. However, not everybody was happy about Jones' appointment as chief, according to the *History of Jacksonville, Florida* by T. Frederick Davis. See sidebar story: Jacksonville's First Chief.

The endeavor was funded by a property tax levy that would generate approximately \$19,000 the first year. Several local banks also loaned money to help launch the department.

On paper, Chief Jones was the "Chief Engineer," and his annual salary totaled \$1,500. The Assistant Engineer earned \$900 annually, while the dozen firefighters earned \$480 each year. Staffing totaled 23, with 13 uniformed members and 10 non-uniformed "Members at Call," according to an 1886-87 report published by the Jacksonville Board of Trade,

a predecessor of Jacksonville's Chamber of Commerce. The titles connected to JFD members were more indicative of function than rank: foremen, drivers of hose carriage, tillermen, hydrantmen, hose-men, hook and ladder men.

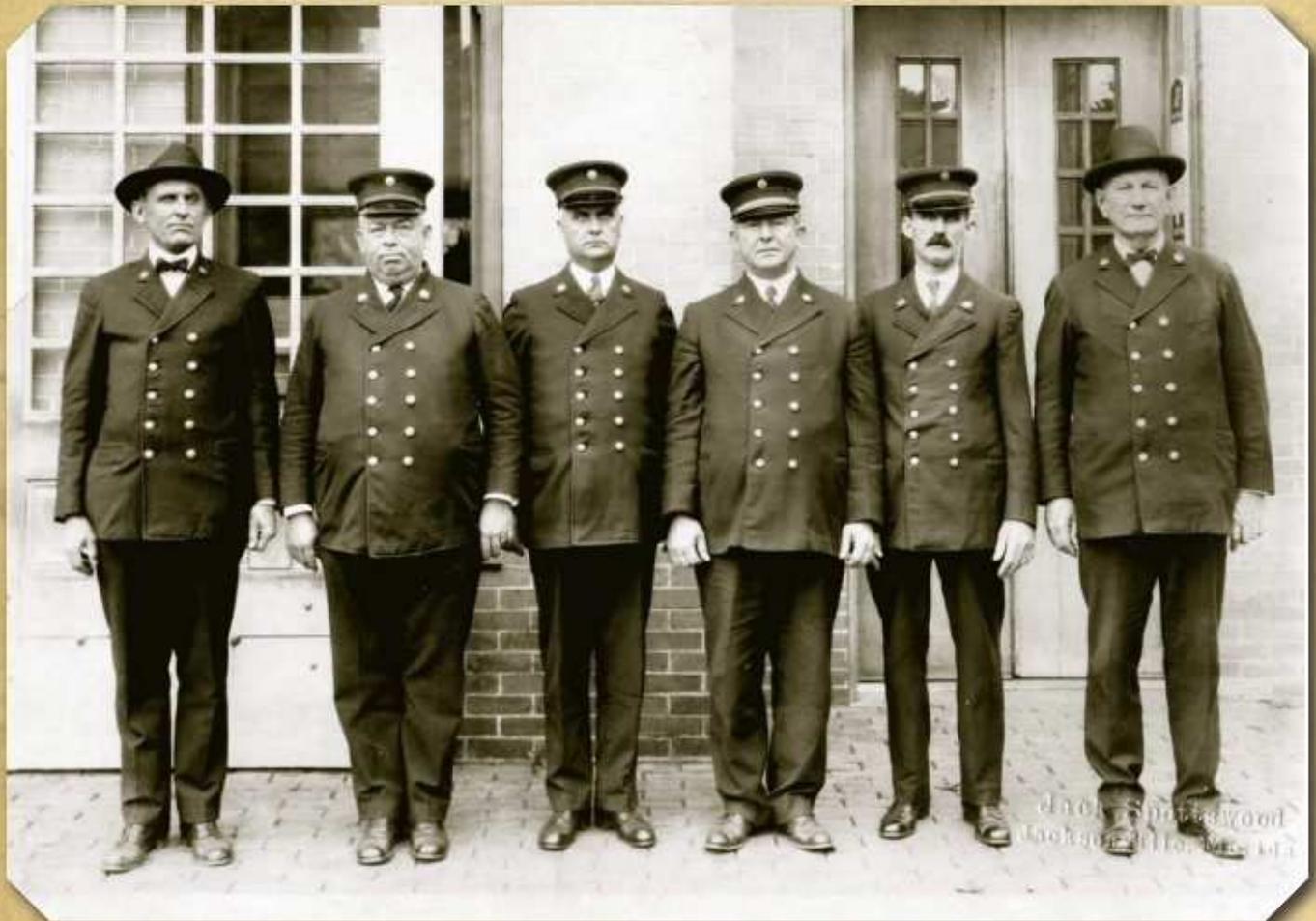
In its infancy, JFD operated from a central station and three substations, which collectively housed five horses and a variety of apparatus. When the alarm rang, the horse stall gates would automatically open, the trained horses would step forward and a swinging harness system would ready them for the run. A list of the department's first-time expenditures appearing in the Board of Trade report includes line items for horse shoeing (\$46.85), horse medicines (\$24.95) and hay (\$382.33).

When Jones delivered his first annual report to the Fire Commissioners in the spring of 1887, as required by city ordinance, he shared his vision for a sophisticated central station or headquarters facility. It would not only house fire apparatus, firefighters and horses but also a repair shop to accommodate maintenance.

Jones also recommended a telephone connection to the future headquarters to expedite response.

Jones' concept was realized in September 1897 when the new Central Station opened at Ocean and Adams streets. Meanwhile, substations 2, 3 and 4 had relocated to better facilities, and a fifth station on Riverside Avenue at Forest Street had been established in January 1897. However, Jones never lived to see most of these developments; pneumonia ended his reign as chief when it claimed his life in 1891. His successor, John Stephens, served less than two years.

JFD wasn't even a Sweet 16 when the Great Fire of 1901 overwhelmed Jacksonville. Thomas Haney had been fire chief for nearly nine years, and, like his predecessors, knew how vulnerable the city his department protected was to fire. As such, he focused on modernizing JFD in terms of equipment and tactics; he also championed improvements to the city's inadequate waterworks and street system. Back then, "Car 1" was a horse and buggy, so Haney had personal experience



Renowned Jacksonville photographer Jack Spottswood captured the leaders of JFD in the 1920s. L-R: Chiefs G.W. McCormick, W.Q. Dowling, L.P. Tracy,

E.B. Zoller, H.R. MacMillan and Thomas Haney, JFD's Fire Chief from 1892-1926.



The helmets these volunteers are wearing identify them as members of the American Hook and Ladder Company. Turnout gear was more decorative than protective in the 1870s.

with traveling some of the troublesome roads and primitive paths en route to fires. Other fire apparatus often got stuck in sand and mud.

Haney, his wife Bessie, and their 2-year-old son Harry were benefactors of Chief Jones' vision. The Haney family lived in an apartment on the third floor of Central Station. On May 3, 1901, Bessie saw trouble coming. As flames approached the station, she took Harry and fled to safety.

Chief Haney sounded the general alarm that Friday afternoon at 12:50. His command, as personally recounted in *The Great Fire of 1901* written by Bill Foley and Wayne W. Wood, involved running to various downtown locations "to keep the department encouraged and make as good a fight as possible against the now raging sea of fire."

Still a young man in his early 40s, Haney's running

led to fainting, and he eventually relinquished command to Assistant Chief Archibald Singer.

Haney rose the next day to rebuild his department. All of his personnel survived, except for one horse which "gave out," according to JFD Foreman Frank King's account in *The Great Fire of 1901*. Three other horses were injured. In addition to the \$15 million ruination of downtown spanning 146 blocks, what likely got Haney's attention on May 4 was the demise of three of the city's five fire stations, including Central Station, his home. Haney also estimated about 3,000 feet of hose was damaged in the fire, but replacement hose was quickly on the way. The Tampa Fire Department donated \$100 to specifically benefit JFD's losses, according to an interview with Haney in *The Florida Times-Union*.

During Haney's 33-year tenure as chief, the longest in department history, JFD saw the introduction of



Central Station's bunk room accommodated more than a dozen firefighters.



Motorized apparatus in JFD came online in 1912 – more than a decade before Station 8, now home to IAFF Local 122, was placed in service.

motorized apparatus, a fire boat, Station 8 and a pension system. The department's strength would reach 140 members and call volumes were approaching 900 annually by the time he retired in 1926.

Haney not only spearheaded improvements for JFD, he dealt with the six-week-long firefighters' strike of 1919. Imagine having to replace approximately 100 firefighters in a matter of days. Twenty years later, he died at age 78 at his Liberty Street home in Jacksonville. His obituary in the Jacksonville Journal on July 20, 1939 stated that "Haney was chief during the period when there was more romance, less science, to firefighting than there is today. Hardly a boy lived in Jacksonville during the first half of the century who didn't want to be a fire chief 'like Chief Haney is' when he grew up."

While that statement was likely a source of pride for JFD and Haney's family, the obituary also offered a truth that Chief Haney truly would have appreciated: "He retired in 1926 at the age of 65, having seen his department grow from a small organization with a central station and three sub-stations to one of the finest in the country."

Acknowledgements & Sources

- Photographs courtesy of Wayne W. Wood and the Jacksonville Historical Society.
- Photographic and historical research courtesy of the Jacksonville Fire Museum's Curator Wyatt Taylor.

Research for this story included these publications:

- History of Jacksonville, Florida
Thomas Frederick Davis
- The 1886-87 Jacksonville Board of Trade Report
- The Great Fire of 1901
Wayne W. Wood and Bill Foley
- Memoirs of Florida
Rowland H. Rerick
- Heroes All: A History of Firefighting in Jacksonville, Florida
John W. Cowart
- Year Book Fire & Police Field Day 1925
- Jacksonville Fire Division 1973 Yearbook
- Century of Service 1886-1986
The Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department
- The Florida Times-Union and Jacksonville Journal

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Coffee Anyone?

Before the Chuck Wagon, our department had the Coffee Cab and the Ladies' Auxiliary. According to JFRD Retiree Bobby Dopson, the auxiliary activated during large-scale events.

This photo is believed to be from the 1930s, and Dopson's grandmother Carrie is the woman in the middle window of the cab. Her husband Chief A.W.

Dopson is to Carrie's immediate right. The other men are unidentified, but Bobby Dopson said the last name of the woman standing outside the cab is Wheatley.

The cab, actually a trailer, was based at the Dopsons' house in Springfield. ON SCENE could not confirm exactly how long the auxiliary operated, but there is a reference to it in JFRD's 1986 Yearbook.



JACKSONVILLE FIRE MUSEUM

If you want close contact with the department's history, visit the Jacksonville Fire Museum at 1406 Gator Bowl Blvd., which is adjacent to Metropolitan Park and the former site of Kids Kampus. The facility served as Fire Station 3 for more than three decades following The Great Fire of 1901. The museum's web site, www.jacksonvillefiremuseum.com, is also an excellent resource of historical information and photography.