

**5600FD-GSM-gau (USMARC); GSG (OCLC/SOLINET)
City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia**

Record Series #: 5600FD
Name: City of Savannah, Georgia Records – Fire Department
Dates: 1867-1947
Extent/Size: 3 volumes (0.25 cubic feet)

Organizational History:

The roots of the Savannah Fire and Emergency Services Bureau (SFES), formerly the Savannah Fire Department (SFD), can be traced back to the late 18th century and the formation of volunteer fire companies in Savannah to combat deadly and destructive conflagrations in the primarily wooden community. Since the 1790s, the City of Savannah subsidized the local fire companies through the purchase of fire engines and equipment, and donation of land for station houses. Many of the early station houses were built in City squares as central locations to the buildings surrounding them. Cisterns and water towers also dotted the squares to provide the water necessary to fight fires.

Following the Civil War, the nature of the fire fighting operations in the community began shifting due to the loss of slave labor formerly used in fighting fires. In 1867, the Savannah Volunteer Fire Department was formed, with Colonel J. F. Waring elected the first Fire Chief, organizing all the volunteer companies into a working unit. In 1875, the Savannah Volunteer Fire Department was disbanded, and a paid department organized with Frank Blair elected as the first Chief Engineer. The Savannah Fire Department was supplemented by a volunteer call force. A gradual shift from an entirely volunteer force, supported by the City, to a fully-paid City force took about forty years, during which the various volunteer companies were replaced by the Savannah Fire Department. In 1890, the call force was abolished, but Hose Company No. 1 continued to provide volunteer support in the southeastern section of the city. In 1900, Fire Chief John Maguire abolished Hose Company No. 1, severing the last tie between the old volunteer system and the modern Savannah Fire Department.

According to an act of Georgia Legislature, the Mayor appointed a Board of Fire Commissioners on December 27, 1895 to oversee the operations of the Savannah Fire Department, and to whom the Fire Chief would report. The original commissioners were William L. Grayson, Robert S. Mell and Hugh Logan. On December 9, 1898, the Legislature abolished the Commission and control of the department returned to the Mayor and Aldermen.

By the end of the 19th century, the use of squares for station houses was discontinued and eventually all remnants of those houses disappeared from the squares. In 1854, Firemen's Hall was built on the southwest corner of Oglethorpe Avenue and Abercorn Street for use by the Savannah Fire Company (one of the leading volunteer companies) and the other local companies. In 1870, the Gamewell Company of New York was contracted to install a police and fire telegraph system. The Gamewell alarm system was used until the 1960s when it was replaced by a telephone system. In 1872, the fire bell, known as "Big Duke" after Alderman Marmaduke Hamilton (of the Fire Committee of City Council), was purchased for use by the Fire and Police departments.

During the twentieth century, the Savannah Fire Department continued to grow and expand with the boundaries and suburbs of the city. See the section titled "Station and Company Histories"

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for information on when new stations and companies were activated and deactivated. In 1911, the department ordered an auto-combination chemical wagon from American La France Fire Engine Company. The City was so pleased with the new wagon, it ordered an additional eleven pieces of motorized apparatus from American La France. All the pieces were received by 1912, making Savannah the first city in the United States to fully motorize its fire department. In 1923, Chief Walter S. Blanton organized the two platoon system to allow for night and day shifts, improving the working conditions for the firemen. In 1929, Chief John H. Monroe designed and invented a water tank to replace the old soda-acid tank. The design was so successful it spread around the country through an article in *Fire Engineering Magazine* and became standard equipment. The emergence of an Inhalator Squad in the 1950s reflected the beginning of the trend of fire departments to answer a variety of rescue related calls, from automobile accidents to medical calls. This transition of the function of the fire department is reflected in the change of the department's name from Savannah Fire Department to Savannah Fire and Emergency Services in 1996 (although many people still refer to it as the Savannah Fire Department).

Prior to the change of the City of Savannah to a council-manager form of government in 1954, the position of Fire Chief was an appointment of the Mayor and Council subject to the frequent changes in administrations (at the time City Council elections were held every two years). Following the placement of the Fire Chief under the control of the City Manager, more consistent leadership was allowed to foster under longer-term Fire Chiefs.

In 1963, Savannah became the second city in Georgia to employ African American firemen when they hired six former Savannah State College (now Savannah State University) students: Purdy Bowers, Theodore Rivers, Lewis Oliver, Porter Screen, Cordell Heath, and Warnell Robinson. All six men were assigned to Station No. 4, the only station which had segregated facilities. In 2001, Paul Lewis Taylor became the City's first African American Chief. Kimberly Susenbach was hired in June 1991 as the department's first female firefighter.

For more information about the early history of the Savannah Fire Department and local volunteer fire companies see the following publications:

Historical Souvenir: Savannah Fire Department. Compiled by John E. Maguire. Savannah, GA: The Fireman's Relief Fund Association, 1906.

A History of the City Government of Savannah, Ga., from 1790 to 1901. Compiled by Thomas Gamble, Jr., Secretary to the Mayor. Savannah, GA: Savannah City Council, 1900.

Records of the Savannah Fire Department, from its organization, 1st February 1867, to 31st December 1872. By Joseph A. Roberts, Chief Engineer. Savannah, GA: 1873.

Scope and Content:

Record Series 5600FD City of Savannah, Georgia Records – Fire Department (1867-1947), is arranged into the following sub-series. See Scope and Content notes for each sub-series for further information about the content and arrangement of the materials.

5600FD-010 Treasurer's Day Book

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5600FD-020 Historical Souvenir, Savannah Fire Department
5600FD-030 Souvenir Year Book, Savannah Fire Department

Related Collections:

Record Group 5100 City of Savannah, Savannah Fire and Emergency Services Bureau
Records.

Record Group 5100D Savannah Fire and Emergency Services Collection.

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Sub-series #: 5600FD-010

Name: Treasurer's Day Book

Dates: 1867-1873

Extent/Size: 1 volume (0.09 cubic feet)

Sub-series description:

Sub-series 5600FD-010 Treasurer's Day Book (1867-1873) includes one volume recording departmental transactions. The records include: date of the transaction; who was paid; payment number; amount of payment or deposit; and monthly totals.

Arrangement:

Chronological.

Inventory:

5600FD-010 Volume 1 Treasurer's Day Book, 1867-1873

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Sub-series #: 5600FD-020

Name: Historical Souvenir, Savannah Fire Department

Dates: 1906

Extent/Size: 1 volume (0.08 cubic feet)

Sub-series description:

Sub-series 5600FD-020 Historical Souvenir, Savannah Fire Department (1906) is a written history of the Savannah Fire Department compiled by John E. Maguire and published by the Fireman's Relief Fund Association.

Inventory:

5600FD-020 Volume 1 Historical Souvenir, Savannah Fire Department, 1906

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Sub-series #: 5600FD-030

Name: Savannah Year Book, Savannah Fire Department

Dates: 1947

Extent/Size: 1 volume (0.08 cubic feet)

Sub-series description:

Sub-series 5600FD-030 Savannah Year Book, Savannah Fire Department (1947) includes one year of a serial publication produced by the Savannah Fire Department as an annual of the department. The year book includes: a short history of the Savannah Fire Department; basic fire safety advice; information on how to contact the Fire Department in an emergency; images of famous fires; and advertisements from local merchants and organizations.

Note:

See Record Group 5100 City of Savannah, Savannah Fire and Emergency Service Bureau Records for additional volumes of the Savannah Fire Department yearbooks.

Inventory:

5600FD-030 Volume 1 Savannah Year Book, Savannah Fire Department, 1947