Ehe News - Journal

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1982

Fire Prevention, **A Year Around Job Original Fireman Heralds Hoke County's History**

Hoke County firemen and their uests Thursday night heard Robert Gatlin, one of the two surviving original members of the first organized Raeford Fire Department, describe the history of firefighting and fires, including the blaze that destroyed half a dozen businesses in downtown Raeford December 30, 1925.

SECTION II

That, Gatlin pointed out, was the stimulant that started the organizing of the modern Raeford Fire Department.

The occasion of Gatlin's speech and the presence of the firemen and their guests was the Fire Prevention Week dinner of the Hoke County Firemen's Association.

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During the dinner, Hillcrest and North Raeford departments' firemen were called out to put out a blaze in the kitchen of James Gay's house on Airport Road. Firemen reported later they confined the damage to the kitchen.

Gatlin and T.B. Upchurch, Jr., are the only survivors of the 20 men who were the original firefighters of the Raeford department formed shortly after the downtown fire. The Raeford department also was the first of 10 fire departments formed in Hoke County. Gatlin was a high school student when he was appointed. He served 38 years and retired 16 years ago but is still active in the department.

The other original members of the Raeford department were R.B. Lewis, fire chief, Paul Johnson, assistant chief. Harry Greene, captain, John Blue, secretary, and Lonnie Teal, E.E. Fridell, and Star McMillan, trustees, Dee Currie, Alfred Cole, Julian Johnson, McNair Smith, Jap Davis, C.E. Upchurch, Lewis Upchurch, Benton Thomas, Walter Baker, John Walker and W.L. Poole. Gatlin said the downtown fire

destroyed buildings on the east side of Main Street from East Central Avenue into Hoke Drug Co. where it was finally stopped.

He said. "Fire departments from Aberdeen, Pinehurst, Red Springs, Fayetteville and Ft. Bragg fought this fire for over four hours before bringing it under control.'

"As a result of this holocaust," he added, "the Raeford Volunteer Fire Department was born. Twenty men were picked for the personnel of this organization to serve without remuneration. (Volunteers). Two days after the fire, a

representative of the American LaFrance Co., which still makes fire engines, came to Raeford to discuss a sale, and a then-modern fire engine was bought, Gatlin recalled. This engine still runs, appearing in parades and special displays, and can be used in emergencies if needed.

The Raeford fire fighters who answered the downtown alarm December 30, 1925, were members of an informal fire-fighting volun.

a wheeled reel bearing the hose. The 1925 volunteers did have a truck, however. Volunteers went to fires on their own as the occasions arose

The water for fighting the fire in 1925 came from hydrants; the firemen didn't have a pumper truck, and getting adequate pressure was a problem.

After getting the LaFrance truck and organizing the department with Lewis as chief, Gatlin continued, the equipment and the men to use it began to respond to fire alarms and to reduce the fire losses in the town to a minimum. He told his audience that addi-

tional trucks were bought to complement or replace the older ones in 1938, 1947, 1965, and 1974.

"The City of Raeford," Gatlin added, "is second to none in equipment, and personnel to man that equipment, for any city com-parable in size."

He said the first truck (in 1926), exhibited at the Raeford fire station on East Prospect Avenue, cost \$6,250. Also shown at the station, Gatlin said, is the most recently purchased truck, and this one cost \$47,000. He said, "This is in-dicative of the progress made in 56 years.

Paraphrasing Abraham Lin-coln's prose style in the Gettysburg Address, Gatlin said near the end of his talk, "You will little note nor long remember what we say here tonight, but you should not forget what those 20 men started and the results of it today."

He closed with: It is for us, the citizenry of the city and county, to be dedicated to the great task before us, to encourage and support this organization with a full measure of devotion; the same devotion that permeated the minds and hearts of that original 20 men, 56 years ago.'

Gatlin opened his address this way: Two score and 16 years ago, our Fathers brought forth to this City, a new organization, conceived in necessity and dedicated to the proposition that all citizens of the Town of Raeford deserve and should have the best fire protection possible. Now we are engaged in celebrating 56 years of successful operation of this organization."

The other volunteer fire departments now serving Hoke County were organized the following this order of time with their present fire chiefs are listed: Hillcrest -- Ed McNeill; Rockfish --Frank Bundy; Puppy Creek --Buddy Newton; North Raeford --Johnny Baker; West Hoke --Johnny Kershaw; Stonewall -- Neil McKenzie; Pine Hill -- Walter Purcell; and Antioch -- Joel Dial, Jr.



Smokey Bear and friends during Saturday's activities. (Photo by Pam Frederick).

Cafeteria of Hoke County High School and in cooperation with the Raeford-Hoke County Chamber of

Commerce. It is an annual event for the county firemen's association

The dinner was catered by Mrs. Clara Pope, Hoke County school

food service supervisor, and her staff.

Steve Parker, vice president of

the Chamber of Commerce, welcomed and gave recognition to the guests, and McNeill, president of the association, made the response and introduced Gatlin.

The association expressed gratitude to the following for their financial support of the dinner; Farm Bureau Insurance Co., United Carolina Bank, Avery Connell Insurance Agency, W.L. Poole Insurance Agency, Southern Na-tional Bank, and Heritage Savings & Loan Association.

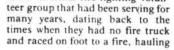
Gatlin also is a former chief of the Raeford department.

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Former Raeford Fire Chief Robert Gatlin, standing in front of the bulletin board, addresses the audience at the annual Hoke County Firemen's Association dinner. Gatlin was one of the 20 men in the modern Ractord Volunteer Fire Department when it was established in 1926. (Staff photo by Pam Frederick).





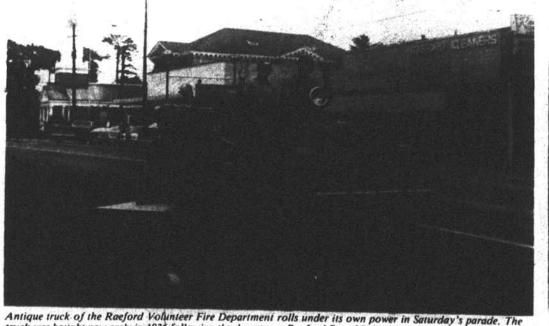
Robert (Buster) Jackson is chief of the Raeford department, the only fulltime fire chief in the county.

The dinner was held at Gibson



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Fireman tosses a water-filled balloon in a Fire Prevention Week demonstration. (Staff photo by Pam Frederick),



truck was bought new early in 1926 following the downtown Raeford fire of December 30, 1925. (Photo by Pam Frederick).



Blindfolded fireman demonstrates his accuracy with a hose at the Fire Prevention Week program at Edinborough Shopping Center. (Photo by Pam Frederick).

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