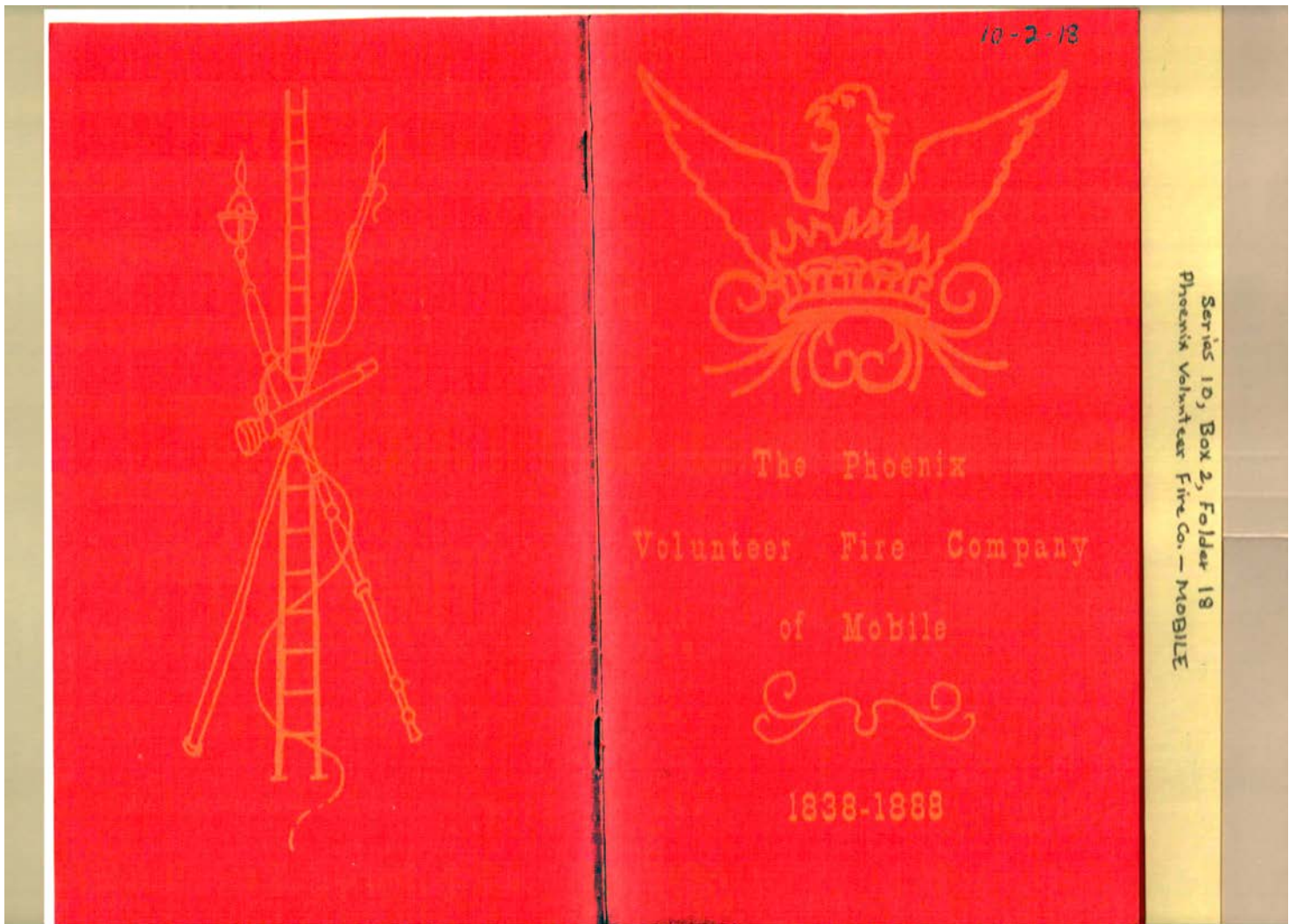


Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 1 r10_02-18-000-0107 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Phoenix Volunteer
Fire Company of

Mobile

Places:

Mobile, AL

Types:

booklet

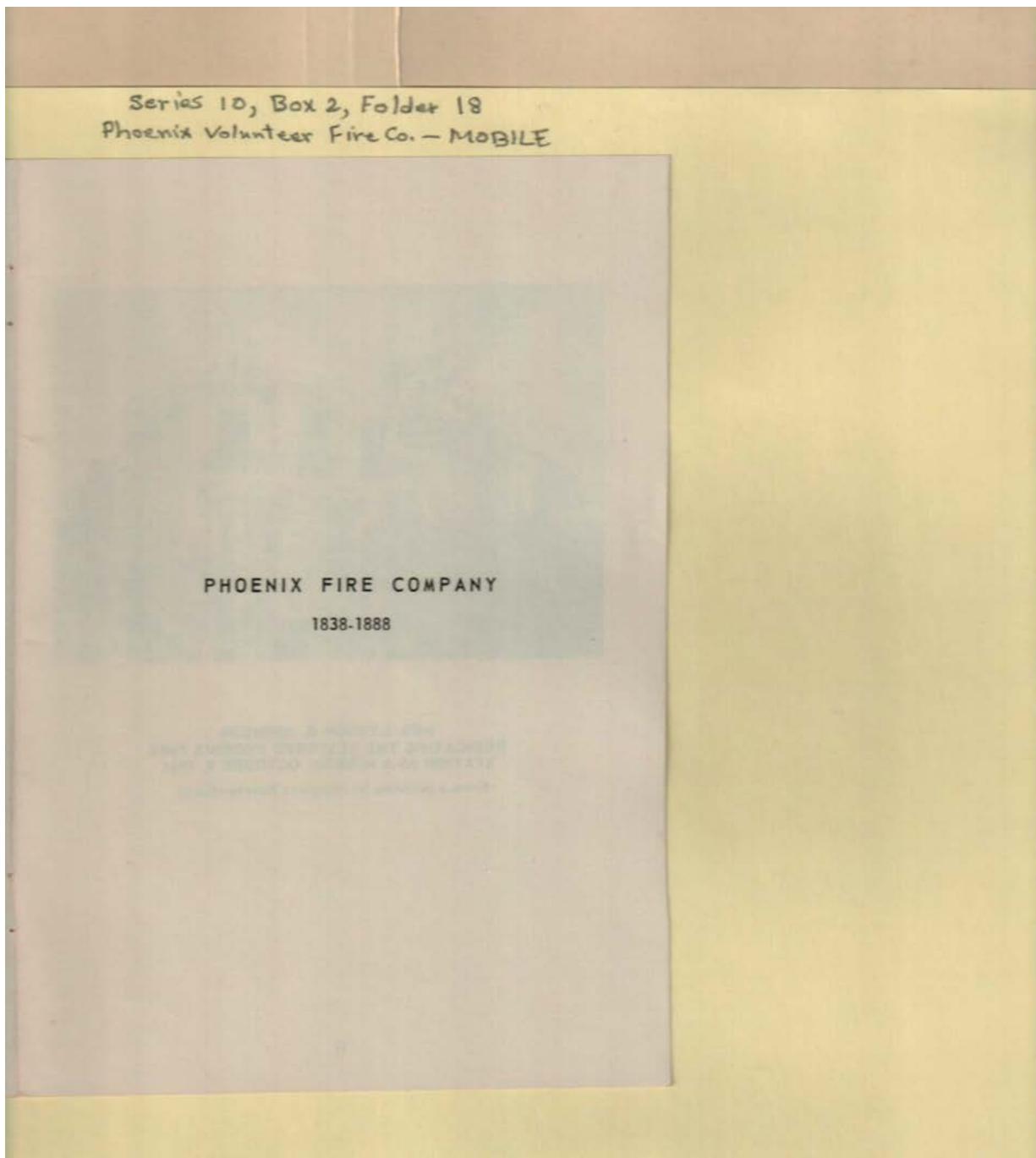
Dates:

1838-1888

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 2 r10_02-18-000-0108 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Phoenix Fire
Company

Types:

booklet

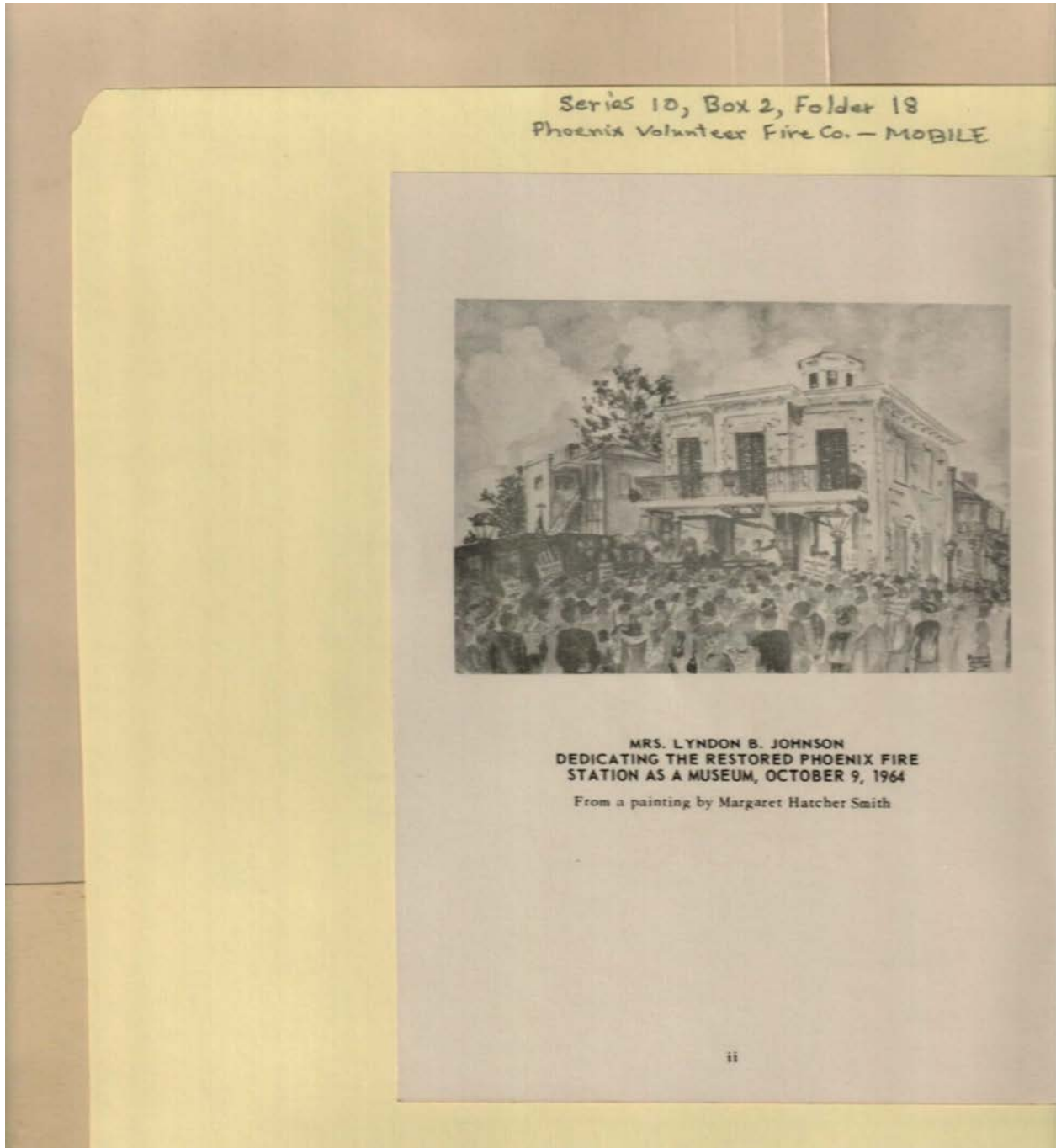
Dates:

1838-1888

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 3 r10_02-18-000-0109 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Johnson, Lyndon B.,
Mrs.

Phoenix Fire Station

Smith, Margaret
Hatcher

Places:

Mobile, AL

Types:

booklet

painting

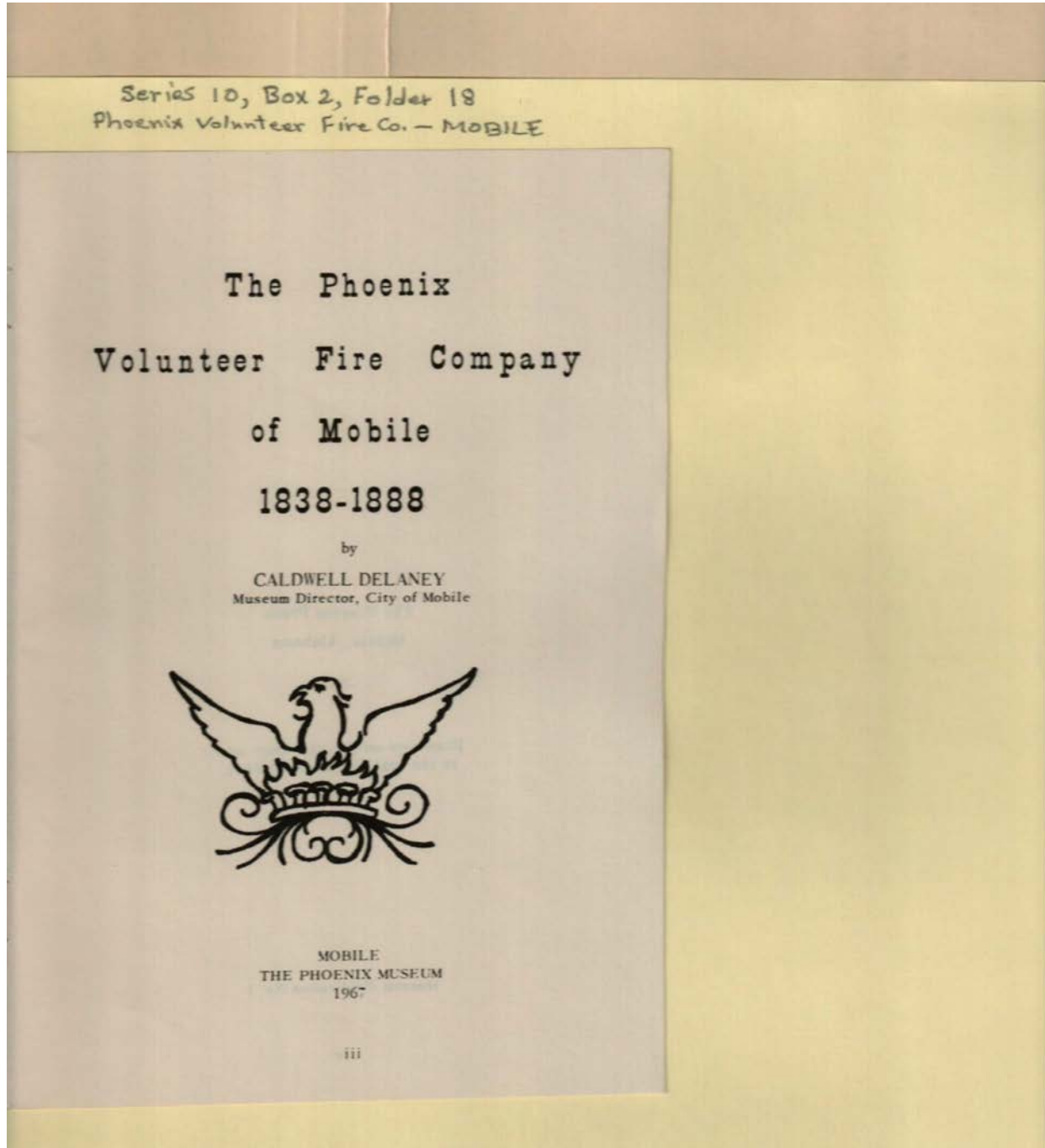
Dates:

Oct 09, 1964

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 4 r10_02-18-000-0110 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Delaney, Caldwell

Phoenix Volunteer
Fire Company of

Mobile

Places:

Mobile, AL

Types:

booklet

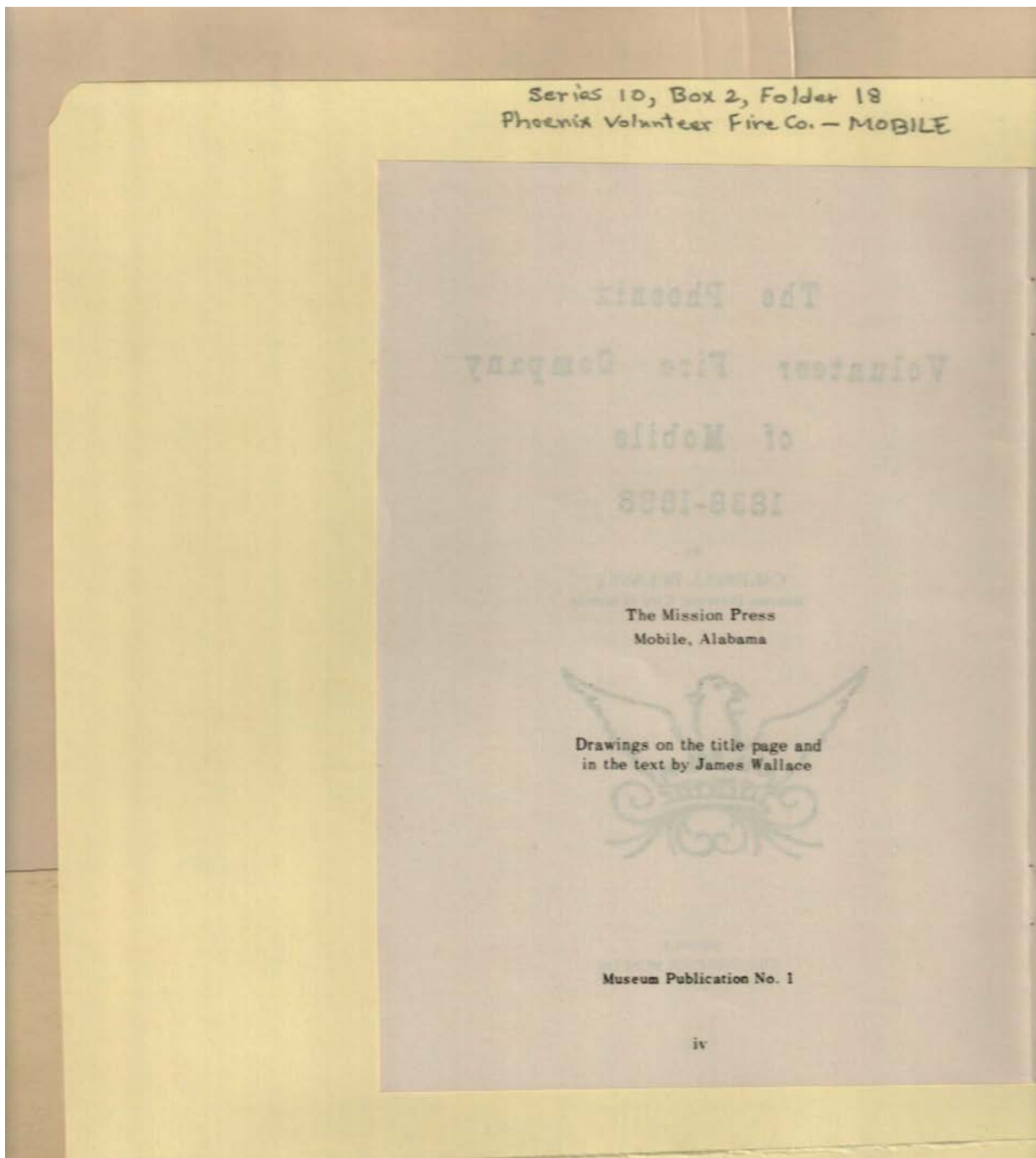
Dates:

1967

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 5 r10_02-18-000-0111 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Wallace, James

Places:

Mobile, AL

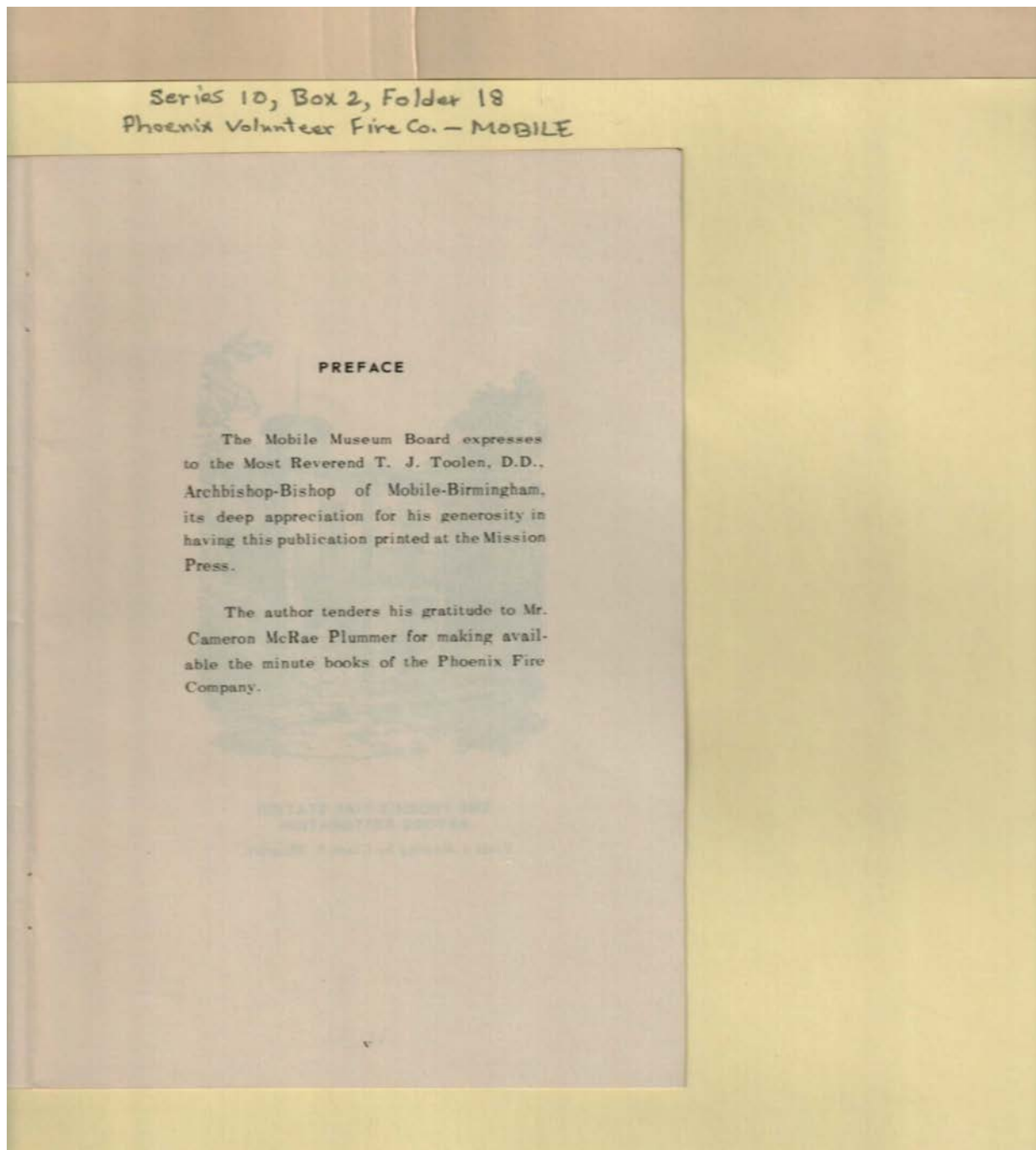
Types:

booklet

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 6 r10_02-18-000-0112 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Plummer, Cameron
McRae

Toolen, T. J., Rev.

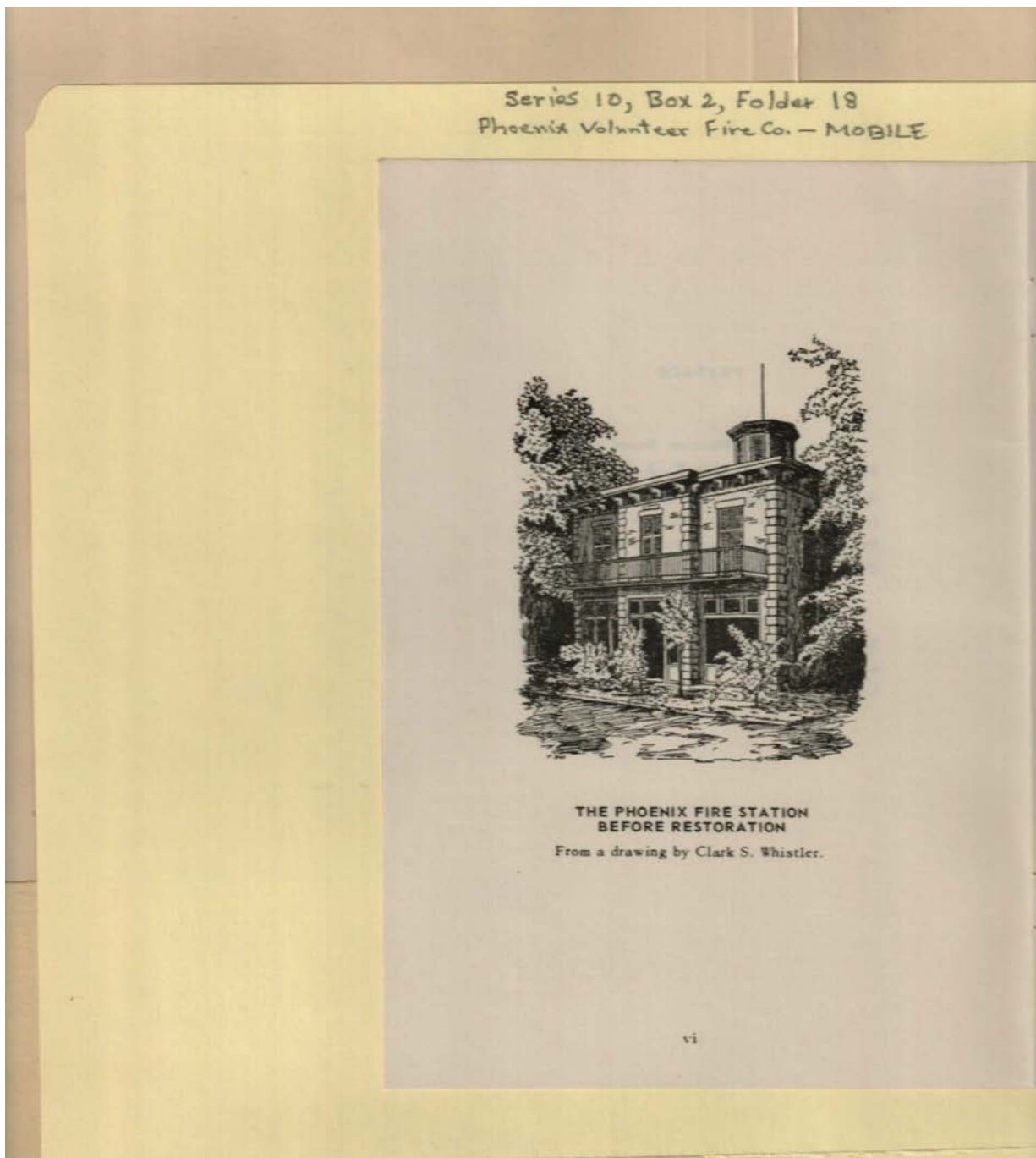
Types:

booklet

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 7 r10_02-18-000-0113 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Phoenix Fire Station

Whistler, Clark S.

Places:

Mobile, AL

Types:

drawing

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Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. — MOBILE

Mobile, like most old American cities, was protected by volunteer fire companies for many years before a paid fire department was instituted.

By 1835 several volunteer organizations had come and gone, but five remained and were well established. The oldest of these had been founded in 1819, so already there was a record of service to the community upon which to base pride in membership. Already, too, there was beginning to be evidence of a feeling that any able young man who was not contributing his youth and strength to the protection of his city was not really a good citizen.

And there were other reasons for membership in a fire company being desirable, even necessary, to an ambitious young man. The companies were social as well as civic. It had not taken them long to realize that in a fun-loving city already conditioned to the closed membership of the Cowbellion de Rakin Society, the nation's oldest mystic organization, they could become powerful by being exclusive.

The grand costume balls of the mystic societies, at that time held in the Christmas season, were rivalled by the equally grand balls of the fire companies in the spring. A young man who dreamed of getting ahead in the community did not have much hope of doing so unless he could make an appearance at these balls and rub shoulders with the elect.

So it happened in the spring of 1835 that a group of young men, eager to be at the ball, met on February 26 and formally organized themselves into the Phoenix Fire Company, taking their title from the mythical bird which arose from its own ashes renewed and vigorous. They adopted a constitution and by-laws, elected officers, and presented themselves to the community. Their services were accepted, and they were assigned the number 6 to indicate their chronological relationship to the already existing companies: Creole No. 1, Neptune No. 2, Franklin No. 3, Merchants No. 4, and Torrent No. 5.

They attended the ball at the Mansion House, which was probably very much like the one reported three years later by the Mobile Register in these words:

The firemen's ball came off last night pretty much in the style that all fine balls do. There was the usual blaze of gas light and of beauty there, the wonted evisceration of the grand opera for the

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE



quadrille music. There was the usual amount of whirling, flitting, gyrating, eddying in the waltz, and the full sum of fun and frolic. The ballroom was a perfect gem in its decorations. The drapery was arranged with admirable taste and the banners of the different companies were disposed as to heighten the effect wonderfully.

But after ball came the serious business of fire-fighting.

On the ninth of April of that same year, 1838, the Mobile Fire Department was organized with the Phoenix company a charter member. This was merely an association of volunteer companies, but it was legally established by the city and it opened the way for city supervision by a chief engineer and city contribution to the purchase and upkeep of equipment. It also set uniform company organization patterns and provided some tax exemptions for members in good standing. The major significance of the date, however, was that it became the occasion of an annual celebration, featuring an enormous parade of decorated engines and uniformed firemen, which rivaled in magnificence and appeal the mystic parades of the Christmas season. Indeed, prior to the Civil War, the great spring spectacle in Mobile was the Ninth of April parade, and even after the war, when Mardi Gras had come into general celebration, the excursions by river boat and train were to Firemen's Day rather than to the carnival.

Tradition sprang up quickly in old Mobile, and soon the red amaryllis, so well suited to showy decoration of engine and hose cart, came to be called "Ninth of April lilies." The occasion came to be accepted also as the proper time for men to put on straw hats and for children to take off shoes and experience the first toe-wiggling ecstasy of barefoot freedom.

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

Fire engines had to be built to order in those days, and it was March 17, 1840, when the Phoenix company received their first one - a beauty built by Merrick and Agnew of Philadelphia.

Within less than a month they were able to show off their prize in the parade of that year, and they made quite a showing. The adopted uniform consisted of a tin hat in the shape of a beaver, with a figure 6 on the front; a broad black belt with the word "Phoenix" spelled out in block letters across the front; and a cape of glazed material on the back of which was painted a Phoenix arising from the flames. So gaudily launched, the Phoenix Fire Company was now in business.

The minute books of the company for these early years, which have survived, record in fascinating detail the operation of a typical company of the era. They report the condition of the engine and apparatus, those present at fires and those absent, and fines imposed for absences and neglect in failing to prepare programs for meetings or perform duties. Repeated absence on regular cleaning days is censured, as is an occasional inebriation in uniform; and thanks are tendered for refreshments served at fires.

The early pages, however, are filled with accounts of the travail of getting started. A wealthy patron rented their first engine house for them, but this kindness came to an end. They struggled for a while to pay their own rent while begging the city to provide an engine house. When the authorities dawdled and evaded, the company published a notice in the paper stating that unless relief came they would be forced to withdraw the engine from service and leave it exposed in the street. This gesture brought the grant of a lot on Conti Street between Royal and St. Emanuel next to the Guard House, and eight hundred dollars for building a station.



Names:

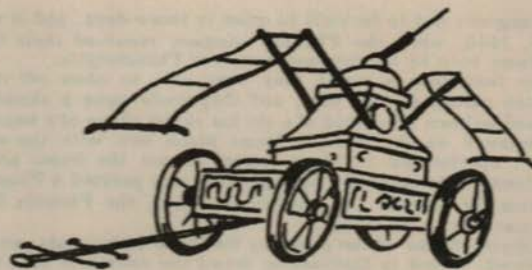
Agnew,

Merrick,

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE



When they stood inspection with the other companies early the next year, the Phoenix Fire Company could share the pride in the newspaper's comment that, "No city in the Union can boast a more efficient and energetic fire department or a finer body of men." Apparently, however, they had no more enthusiasm than the others for the suggestion that they organize as a military unit and adopt a "cheap and plain uniform."

Their log recounted routine service, but occasionally a bit of unintentional humor crept in. In reading it, one can almost feel their weary exasperation, as when it was recorded: "On the morning of September 14, [1841] at half past 7 o'clock the alarm of fire was given. The engine and apparatus was taken out and proceeded as far as Commerce Street, but, ascertaining the fire to be only a chimney of the Alhambra caused by the cook upsetting the frying pan, the engine and apparatus returned to the house. Roll called--eighteen members present."

Or, ten days later: "An alarm of fire was given about 11 o'clock. The engine and apparatus were taken out and proceeded to Bloodgood's Wharf, the first below Conti Street. The Phoenix was the first on the spot and was first in working order in double quick time. The fire being on the brig Pulaskie loaded with lime, it was impracticable to throw on water. The brig was cast off from the wharf and run into the marsh on the opposite side of the river. The engine and apparatus returned to the house. Roll called. Twenty-eight members present."

There is wry humor also in some of their most solemn personal business. When one of their members died, they appointed a committee on September 6, 1841, to raise money for defraying the expenses of removing his remains to Philadelphia.

On October 4, the committee reported progress and begged to be continued.

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. — MOBILE

On November 1, they reported that \$48 had been subscribed.
On December 6, they had \$50 subscribed.

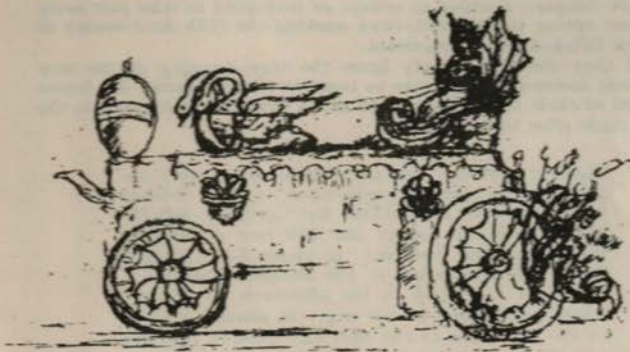
On February 7, 1842, they were ordered to collect the amount subscribed and forward it to the widow.

On April 4, they reported that they had "not quite completed their arrangements."

On May 9, they reported that they had raised \$35.50, of which they had paid \$10 to have the body removed to the ship, and had sent \$25 to the widow. They begged to be dismissed.

On the ninth of December, 1841, the Phoenix Fire Company No. 6 of Mobile was incorporated by the Alabama Legislature under that title. By charter it was to consist of no more than eighty members and was to keep in good order one fire engine with all the necessary equipment. When a second engine was put into operation the membership could be increased to one hundred.

With this act of the Legislature the Phoenix entered into the ranks of the elite. Its members were exempt from militia duty, road taxes, and jury duty. After five consecutive years of faithful service they were eligible to become "exempt firemen" and enjoy for the remainder of their lives all the privileges and immunities of active members.



DESIGN FOR THE DECORATION OF AN ENGINE

From a drawing by Gus Hines, a famous Mobile designer of Mardi Gras parades.

Names:

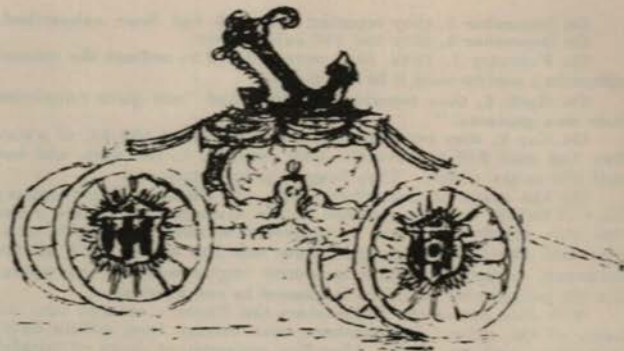
Fire Engine

Hines, Gus

Types:

drawing

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE



Perhaps to celebrate this new elevation in the world, the Phoenix company decided to accept an invitation to take part early the next spring in the festivities marking the fifth anniversary of the New Orleans Fire Department.

If they did not already know the true meaning of the term "visiting firemen", they were to learn in New Orleans. No better account of their adventure can be given than that contained in the report made after their return:

March 11, 1842. The Chief Director of the Company during our late expedition to New Orleans begs leave to report that the Company left the house with the engine and 100 feet of hose on Wednesday the 2nd inst. at about 3-1.2 o'clock P.M. and proceeded to the Steamer Kingston... At about 5 o'clock in the afternoon we left the wharf and started on our trip. At about 2 o'clock in the afternoon of the next day when in the lake and 20 or 30 miles from the place of landing we met the Steamboat Champion with a delegation of New Orleans firemen on board. They joined us and we proceeded together. At 5 o'clock P.M. we arrived at the wharf where we found a few more firemen and after placing our engine on one of the cars, we all proceeded to the City. At the

Names:

Champion (Steamer)

Kingston (Steamer)

Types:

booklet

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Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

railroad depot we found many more firemen, who took the machine from the car and escorted us up to the old house of the Louisiana Hose Company where we deposited our engine. Hence we proceeded directly to the City Hotel and took up our quarters. On Friday morning between 9 and 10 o'clock the 4th inst. (the engine having been previously cleaned) the Company proceeded to the engine house to join in the procession. At about 10 o'clock A.M. the Company moved, the engine taking the lead drawn by four horses, the band of music following and then the Company. We marched in this manner some distance when we came to the procession of New Orleans firemen already formed. They opened as we came up and allowed us to pass through their entire length to the head of the line. Soon after, the procession began to move, and after marching about the City for several hours it entered Mr. Clapps Church where we had the pleasure of listening to an able oration from A. Walker Esq. After the services were concluded, the Company, escorted by a number of the New Orleans Companies, returned to the house and thence, after stopping to comply with invitations to drink from a number of the New Orleans Companies, we proceeded to the hotel. In the evening at the invitation of Mr. Geo. Holland the Company attended the St. Charles theatre and listened among other things to a 'Firemen's Address' and a 'Firemen's Song' written for the occasion. On Saturday afternoon, at the request of the Chief Director of No. 13 and one or two other gentlemen of the fire Department, the Company proceeded with the apparatus to the street in front of Parkers Church as it is called, and although there was a smart breeze blowing against us at the time, we succeeded in throwing a clear stream from the gallery over the ball of the church, said to be about 128 feet high. Soon after, in attempting to play two streams, one of the New Orleans firemen who was on the gallery with one of our Directors lost his foothold and fell, injuring the pipe so that we could not well use it any longer. The Company then returned with the apparatus to the house. In the evening at a little before nine o'clock we sat down to a collation

Names:

Clapps,

Holland, George

Walker, A.

Types:

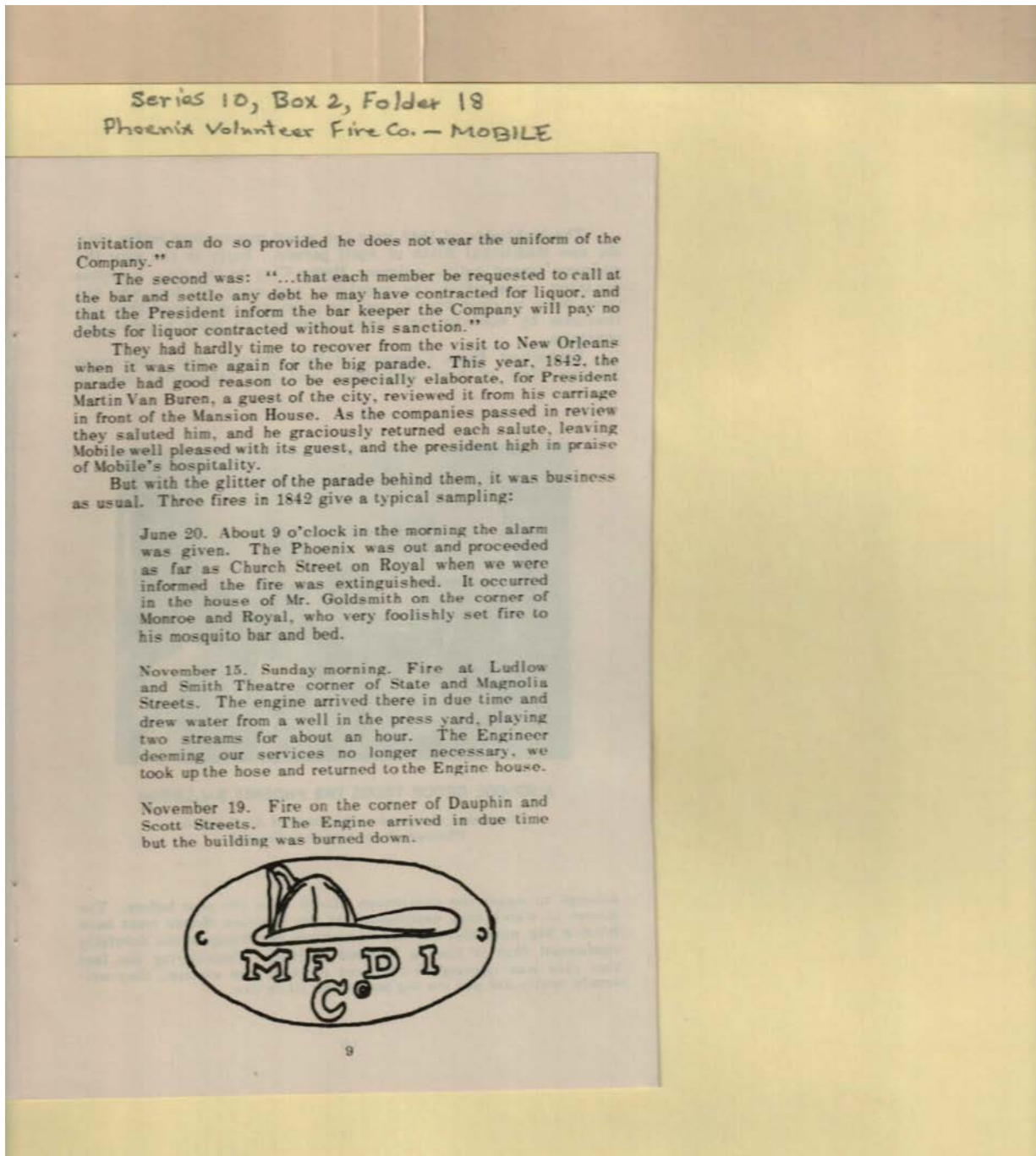
booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. — MOBILE

with No 6 of New Orleans at the City Hotel and remained there until nearly ten o'clock. We then proceeded to the St. Charles Exchange to partake of a collation with the exempt firemen and stayed with them (wine and toasts passing freely around) until twelve o'clock at night when we returned to the City Hotel. On Sunday morning the 6th inst. at about 10 o'clock the Company proceeded to the Municipal Hall of the Second Municipality, and after partaking of a collation with the Municipal authorities we proceeded to the engine house and thence started at once with the apparatus for the railroad depot. On the road to the railroad depot the escort of New Orleans firemen was very large and the members of the Company were not suffered to touch the ropes. At 12 o'clock M the Company left with the Machine and escorted by a great number of the New Orleans firemen for the lake. At about 2 o'clock P.M. the boat got clear of the wharf and we started, bringing with us four of the New Orleans firemen who had shown us much attention in New Orleans. The Company arrived in Mobile at 4 o'clock on Monday afternoon, were met at the wharf by many of the Mobile firemen and escorted by them to the Govt. Street wharf, they manning the ropes, and after witnessing the trial between Nos. 3 and 4 the Company proceeded to the house escorted by several of the Mobile fire Companies, and after putting up the engine and escorting our guests to the Mansion House the roll was called and the Company dismissed.

With regard to the conduct of the members during the trip the Chief Director would express the highest degree of satisfaction. He does not think it possible that another body of men could be got together under similar circumstances who would conduct themselves in a better manner, and he very much doubts whether any set of men could be collected under similar circumstances who would conduct themselves as well.

Perhaps some of the high praise of the director could be attributed to two resolutions passed by the company when they were in New Orleans. The first, in reply to an invitation to visit the St. Phillip's Ball, was: "...that any member wishing to accept the



Names:

Goldsmith,

Van Buren, Martin,
President

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. — MOBILE

The highlights of 1843 were two grand processions rather than the one traditional Ninth of April parade. Early in the year the company turned out to welcome Henry Clay to the city, a joyous occasion upon which the populace, and many visitors who had come down by river boat to see the great man, displayed their enthusiasm by mobbing the visitor whenever he made a public appearance.

Protection Hose Company of New Orleans was their guest for the Ninth of April festivities, and they felt called upon to



A SCHOOL GROUP TOURS THE PHOENIX BALLROOM

The mural shows an early Ninth of April parade.
Photograph by Joseph Schershel.

attempt to equal the courtesies shown them the year before. The dinner at which they entertained at the Mansion House must have been a big success, for the committee of arrangements dolefully confessed that it cost a hundred dollars. Considering the fact that this was one-eighth the cost of their fire station, they evidently really did put the big pot in the little one.

Names:

Clay, Henry

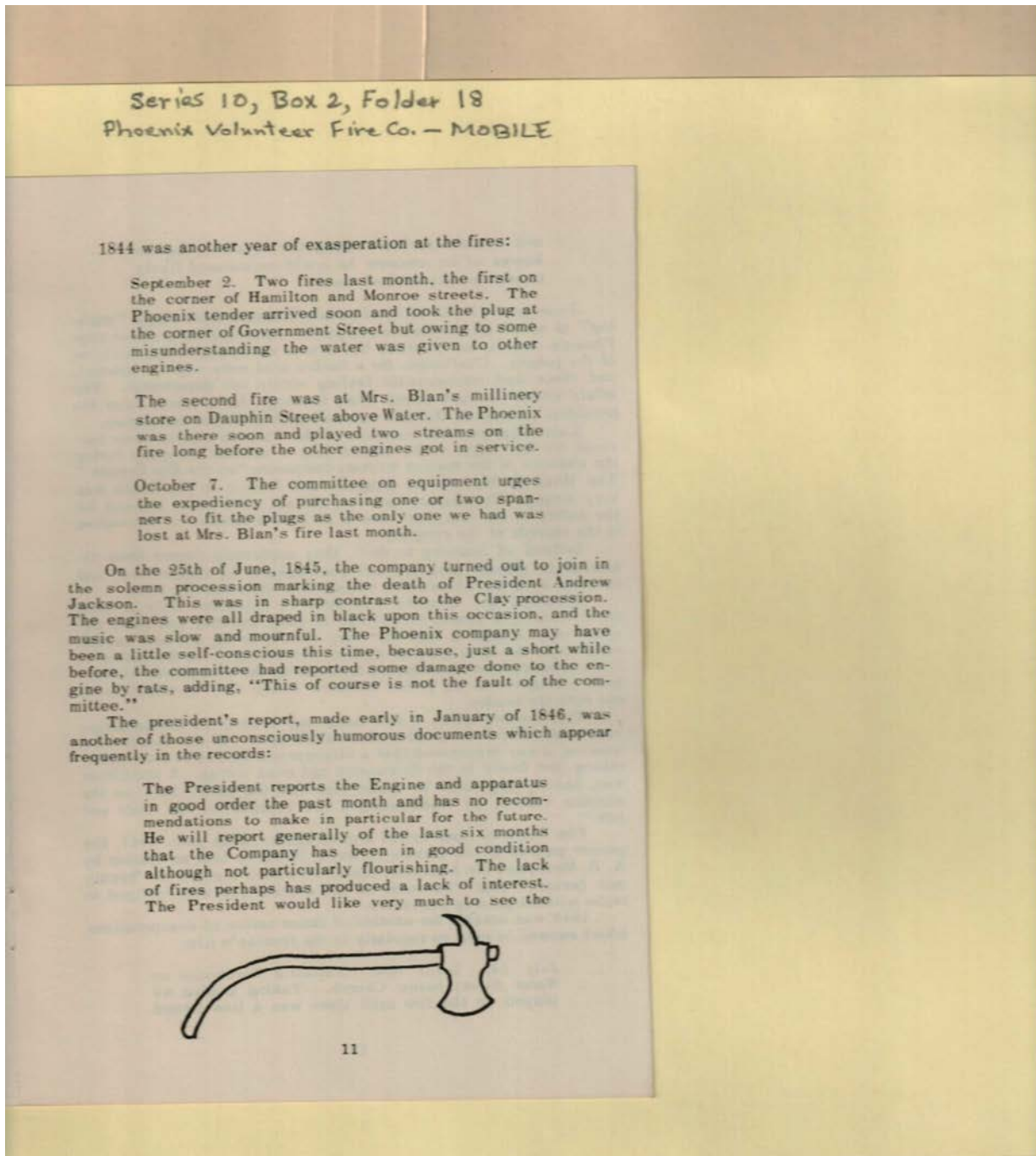
Phoenix Ballroom

Schershel, Joseph

Types:

booklet

photograph



Names:

Blan, Mrs.
Clay, Henry

Jackson, Andrew,
President

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

old interest revived among the members, but he knows of no measure he could recommend likely to produce the desired result.

Prior to the Ninth of April parade that year there was a "working" at which all the Mobile companies competed for a silver cup. Phoenix won it, but Neptune No. 2 took exception to the decision of the judges. Challenges for a further trial were angrily rejected, and there was considerable feeling within the department. The affair seems to have blown over, however, for a month later the president announced that all was well with the other companies.

Later that year the members of the Phoenix offered their services to the mayor to be formed into a military company during the absence of the regular military companies "on the Rio Grande." The Mexican War was in progress and feeling in the South was very strong. The mayor, however, did not seem to be alarmed for the safety of the city, for there is no further mention of the matter in the records of the company.

Instead of learning to drill, they apparently turned their attention to greater pleasure and convenience for themselves, and voted to have gas chandeliers installed in their meeting room.

Although the company had been in existence only a little more than eight years, in that age of early maturity and early decline some began to feel that they were growing old and needed relief from the more arduous duties. Accordingly, on December 7, 1846, a resolution was adopted authorizing the acceptance of fourteen younger men as junior members whose duty it would be to run with the tender.

This sudden influx of new faces may account for the embarrassing event which occurred a short while later. In the middle of a meeting it was discovered that a stranger was seated in their midst, taking part freely in the discussion and even voting. A committee was hastily appointed to escort him from the room; but, as the minutes record, he "addressed a few remarks to the chair and left."

The Ninth of April rolled around again. That year, 1847, the parade paused at the theatre on Royal Street to hear an oration by A. B. Meek, and the handsome orator drew such a crowd of "beauty and fashion" that "hundreds of the sterner sex were obliged to retire without gaining admission."

1848 was notable for another of those series of exasperations which seemed to crop up regularly in the fireman's life:

July 24. 3-1/2 A.M. Tuthill's Warehouse on Water Street below Church. Taking a plug we played on the fire until there was a line formed

Names:

Meek, A. B.

Types:

booklet

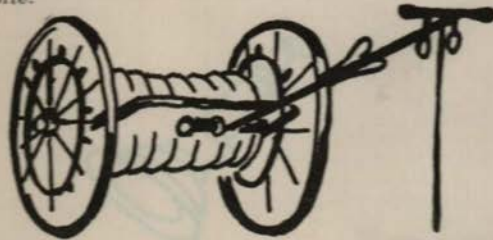
Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

by other Engines from the river... We then moved to Church Street and, taking our hose up through the Sailors Home, played on the burning cotton.

July 25. The same fire broke out in the same place.

July 26. An alarm caused by a fire in the cotton saved from the last fire.

July 27. A fire broke out in the same old cotton pile.



In November the Firemans Insurance office burned, and in December there was another cotton warehouse fire. At the latter they fought the fire all day and remained on watch all night. In the morning they returned to the house with the engine in tow of a dray, there "not being members enough present to drag her."

Even the elements seemed to conspire against them that year, because just before its end they learned that the chocks they ordered from Philadelphia had been shipped on a vessel which was lost at sea.

The next few years were routine. The only break in the monotony was an occasional censure of a member for being visibly intoxicated at a fire. Preparations for the Ninth of April always caused a flurry of excitement, especially if there were visitors from New Orleans. Satin banners or silver trumpets were frequently authorized as presentation pieces. Payment was made for refreshments at the fires or, judging from the number of gallons of brandy upon some occasions, simply for refreshments.

During the month of February, 1850, the company turned out in mourning again, this time for President Zachary Taylor, the hero of the Mexican War. The old spirit seemed to be lagging, however. Membership began to decline, and by 1851 the company was down to 22 active and 25 honorary members.

Names:

Taylor, Zachary,
President

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

The report of the Chief Engineer of the Fire Department for that year gave them one Philadelphia Engine in good condition and one hose carriage with 500 to 600 feet of hose.

The year ended with a bang when a fire was touched off by the torches of the Cowbellion de Rakin Society on New Year's Eve.

1852 brought a flurry of activity aimed at revitalizing the company. The uniform was made a little more dashing with gold trim on the hat and the owner's initials below the "6" and a motto was adopted to go with the phoenix emblem. This was "Resurgo Lucidior," loosely translated as "I rise to shine brighter."



For the Ninth of April parade six cream colored horses, "good gentle horses and well matched," were engaged to pull the engine, and unusual care was given to the decoration. Perhaps to improve their reputation in the field of sobriety, the company accepted the invitation of the Baptist Ladies Ice Cream and Strawberry Party to patronize a booth at the Alhambra after the parade.

1853 seemed to show signs of a renewed vigor. In January a committee was appointed to "procure subscriptions for a new engine and to petition the City for an appropriation for the same". At the same time, probably in anticipation of the greater weight of a new and improved machine, a resolution was passed authorizing, for a one year trial period, the use of horses to draw the engine. Presumably the fourteen younger men would still draw the tender.

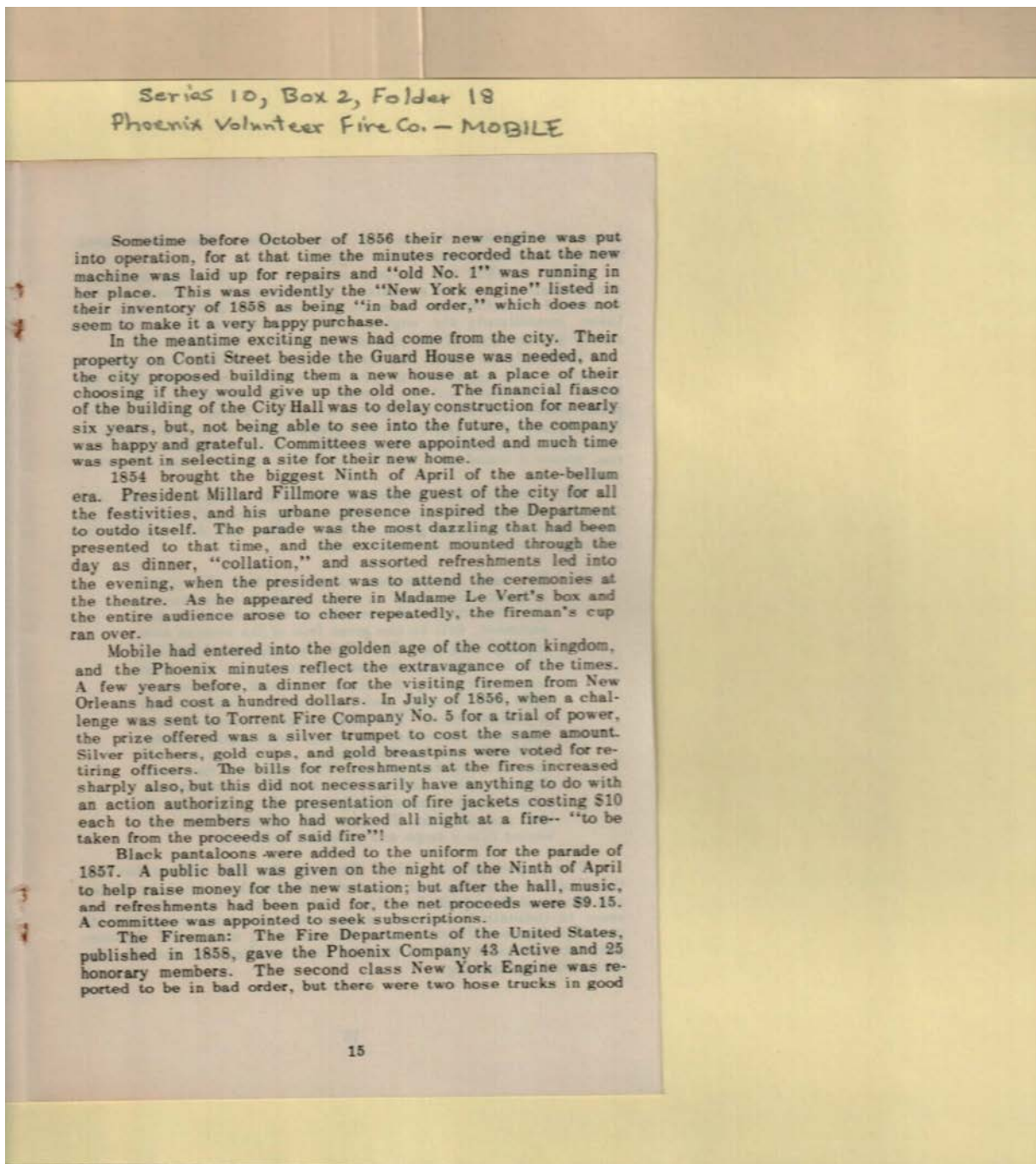
In March the engine was reported in "fair working order considering the time she had been in service," but the hose carriage was a wreck. "having been run into at Barney Van Epps stable" the previous month. They kept in operation, however, and in August made the first report on the use of horses--an enthusiastic endorsement. They had been first on the spot at most of the recent fires, and there could be no doubt of the advantage of horses over men for pulling the engine. So ended an era.

Names:

Van Epps, Barney

Types:

booklet



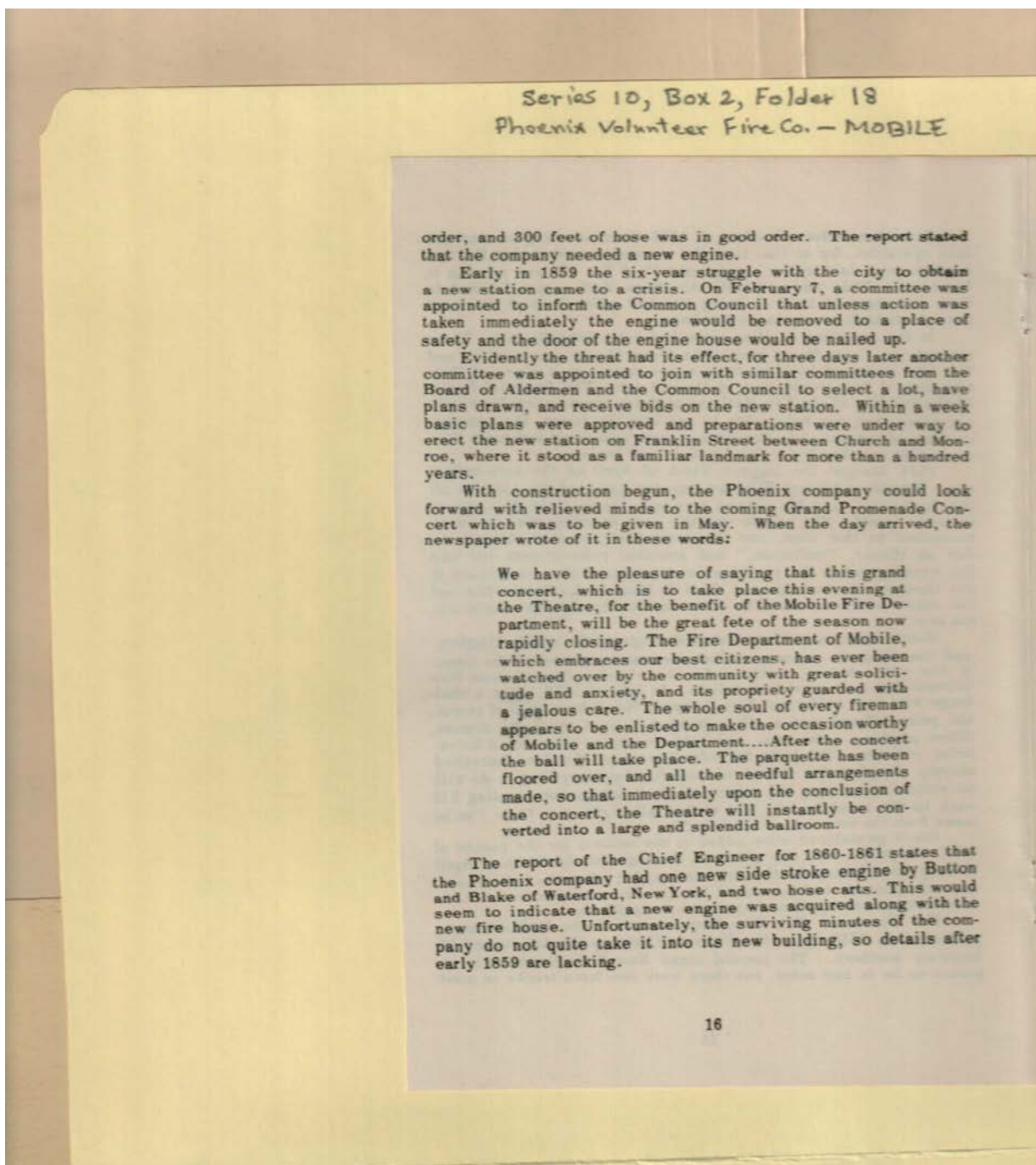
Names:

Fillmore, Millard,
President

Le Vert, Madame

Types:

booklet



Names:

Blake,

Button,

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

It is known that a military company called the Phoenix Rifles was formed from members of the fire company, and that it served throughout the Civil War as a part of the Eighth Alabama Infantry, surrendering with Lee at Appomattox.

In 1866 the company acquired "Reb," the gentle and lovable horse which drew its engine for many years and became a favorite sight in the Ninth of April parades, walking proudly between the ropes while hired horses pulled the engine.

The company continued to give balls, which were reported in the newspaper, and in 1871 it organized its own brass band.

In 1871, also, the company acquired its first steam engine, a Clapp and Jones model. The change to steam marked the end of another era and the opening of a new one. The newspaper account of the Ninth of April parade of that year opened with a recognition of the change:

Another year has been added to the age of our gallant Fire Department, and yesterday, its Thirty-fourth Anniversary was celebrated with all the pomp of gorgeous floral pageantry, and natural would be the pride of its early founders, could they but look down and witness it in the strength and beauty with which it honored the gaze of admiring thousands. Every object worthy of attainment must at times be impeded, but perseverance and discipline have at length accorded to the Mobile Fire Department a high degree of efficiency, and to-day there are but few similar organizations that rank with it in the scale of usefulness. In obedience to the spirit of progress, it has, from year to year, been subjected to various changes, until but few traces remain of its former self, modern invention having, in many instances, supplanted the old familiar hand engines and supplied all the companies but one, with steamers whose fiery lungs and shrill notes form striking contrasts with the happy rollicking songs that once arose from 'all hands' at the brakes. But this is a retrospect pertaining merely to a fascinating excitement, incident to the early history of our firemen, and readily surrendered, when utility offers to aid them in the accomplishment of a duty, self imposed, though rewarded by the plaudits of those who acknowledge true disin-

Names:

Clapp,

Jones,

Lee,

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE



STEAMERS IN THE PHOENIX MUSEUM COLLECTION

From a photograph by Joseph Schershel.

terestedness to be the grandest and noblest impulse that wells up from the human heart. No body of men is entitled to deeper gratitude than that which bares its bosom to the fiery element, standing forth like the remnant at Thermopylae, the protectors of a community, if not of a nation. In time of war the cause of the masses is that of the individual, and the compact of defence is mutually binding, but not so with the fireman, who battles oftener for others than for himself. The clouds of Monday evening threw a damper upon the hopes of those who were to enjoy themselves as participants in and spectators of one of the grandest sights that ever falls to the lot of Mobilians in the way of an annual celebration, but the watery elements withheld their forces, and the next morning dawned pleasantly, with an atmosphere cool enough for comfort, though the moisture of the soil removed a little of Mason's polish, but by no means interfered with the ardor of the admired and the admiring.

Names:

Phoenix Museum
Collection

Schershel, Joseph

Types:

photograph

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

At the first tap of the general alarm, young and old, firemen and all, took note and hurried up for a prompt appearance at the hour designated as the time of the initial scene. Many a nervous little hand found busy employment in arranging clustering curls, silks, grenadines and the indispensable waterfall, the latter, perhaps, receiving special attention, since its name suggests a concomitant not altogether foreign to the avocation of a Fireman; but it is the province of the gentler sex to render themselves attractive, and may they ever succeed as they did yesterday. And now for the rougher members of the human family who take equal pains to render themselves objects of admiration, to which we offer no objection save on the score of broken mirrors.

All were now ready, and at 9 a.m. in response to a second warning from the tower, Mobile turned out en masse, the fire companies coming into Government St. at right angles, and decked in all their floral beauty, enhanced by a magnificent array of ribbons, streamers, and gorgeous banners, while the eager crowd of spectators afforded in their best view, a fine illustration of the I myself principle or theory of number one, showing but little respect to sensitive and comprehensive understandings. But we bid adieu to the ladies, and bowing to

'Gentlemen in tights looming very tall,

And those in shorts looking very small.'

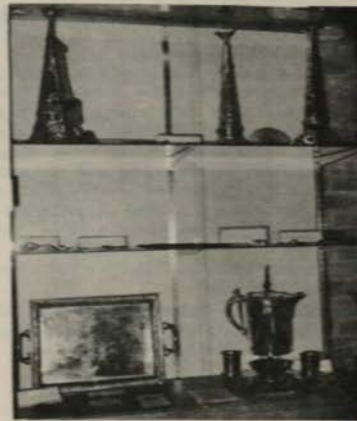
We transfer our readers to the procession.

The participation of the Phoenix company in the parade was described in these words:

A beautiful flag, highly appreciated as the gift of a fair friend, was carried in front of the company, the ropes being held by about sixty-four members, the band inside, swelling the number to eighty, while the well known Reb kept up a prancing accompaniment to the delightful music. The engine was drawn by four splendid black horses elegantly caparisoned. The members were uniformed in black fire hats, red shirts with sailor collars and black pants. Over the engine and near the

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Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. — MOBILE

smoke stack, was a beautiful black velvet stand, covered with a profusion of silverware lined with gold, the prizes won by the company in many hard fought contests. Ribbon streamers, wreaths, and beautiful flowers gave additional charms to, but with all their beauty, could not surpass that of an exquisite polish which glittered from all parts of the engine. Like their brother musicians from Demopolis, the Phoenix band composed of company members, performed their part in a way that reflects very creditably, considering that they have been organized but a short time.



Trophies in the Phoenix Museum Collection

A prominent citizen was so carried away by the parade that he had used about twenty toothpicks trying to light his cigar before friends called his attention to the futility of his efforts and declared him "a fit candidate for the dry dock."

There were many adventures in the transformation from man-power to steam power. One, which befell another company, was typical of the possibilities of unusual happenings when horses.

Names:

Trophies in Museum

Types:

photograph

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

men, and steam were still strangers to one another. The newspaper recounted this story:

All steam fire engine horses are very restive and eager for the start whenever the alarm is sounded, seemingly enjoying the excitement and sport equally as well as the firemen, which was well illustrated by their behavior on Thursday night. When the alarm was sounded the horses were hitched up, and just as the driver was about to mount to the box, the engine-house door was suddenly opened from the outside, and in an instant the horses dashed into the street, without the driver, and started in the direction that the crowds upon the sidewalks were moving. After going over a great many streets, the horses being unable to find the fire--and this was to be expected, for the alarm proved false--quietly walked back to their quarters, bringing in the engine uninjured, save a broken spoke. If there had been a fire, the horses would undoubtedly have found it.

When the property of the fire companies was appraised for the city in 1873, the Phoenix had the highest rating, the value of its equipment being: The Clapp and Jones steamer, \$4,000; a horse truck, \$300; 600 feet of leather hose, \$600; Reb, \$250.

The newspaper account of the 1874 parade gave this treatment to the Phoenix company:

Here was a fine body of men, swinging along with the easy, devil-may-care gait of the old time fire laddie, ready for a fire or a foot race, and only to be grieved by one thing, the 'Washing of the old machine.' Their superb engine was as bright as loving hands could make her, and showed the taste and care of the decorating committee. The smokestack was surmounted with an elegant pyramid and wreath of roses, with a little angel suspended above, which the ladies pronounced 'lovely.' On a stand were a number of trophies of different contests: carefully cherished was a silver cup, won by the first engine the company owned, one of Johnny Agnew's make; on that occasion she threw over the steeple of Christ Church. Supported on the forward suction brackets was an

Names:

Agnew, Johnny

Clapp,

Jones,

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

arch, covered with white satin, ornamented with silver, on which was an elegant design of a 'supply engine,' of three barrels capacity, with silver buckets. On each of the two rear suction brackets, was a silver trumpet, both prizes won by the company; from the top of each, extending to the lamp forward, were two blue ribbons bearing their motto, 'We rise to shine brighter.' The coal box was roofed over and elegantly ornamented with a star of flowers. At the head of the company was carried their rich flag of blue silk, on which was a painting of the 'Phoenix,' and their motto, Resurgo Lucidior. Within the double rope danced their pet horse, 'Reb,' 8 years in service, and the truck horse 'Ramie.' At daylight, in the morning, the shining engine was christened 'Dan Sterling,' by the boys, in honor of his being 'of age' in the company, having served 21 years.



Dress Worn in the Phoenix Ballroom in 1860

Names:

Dress from Phoenix
Ballroom

Types:

photograph

Dates:

1860

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Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

In the 1870's and 1880's parades reached the peak of their popularity in America. Mobile, already a veteran in the field, naturally excelled in the peculiar arts employed in the production of these spectacles. The men who designed the Mardi Gras parades also provided designs for the decoration of engines and tenders for the Ninth of April parades. This was beginning to be apparent in the 1875 parade, in which the Phoenix had a theme for the first time:

The Decorating Committee of the ancient and reliable Phoenix No. 6 chose 'Fidelity' as their subject theme, and that they carried it out to the fullest extent of polish and brightness, all will bear witness. The company paraded on this occasion with eighty men on the ropes, and this, together with the tasteful manner in which the decorations had been placed, evoked unstinted tokens of approbation no less than of surprise.



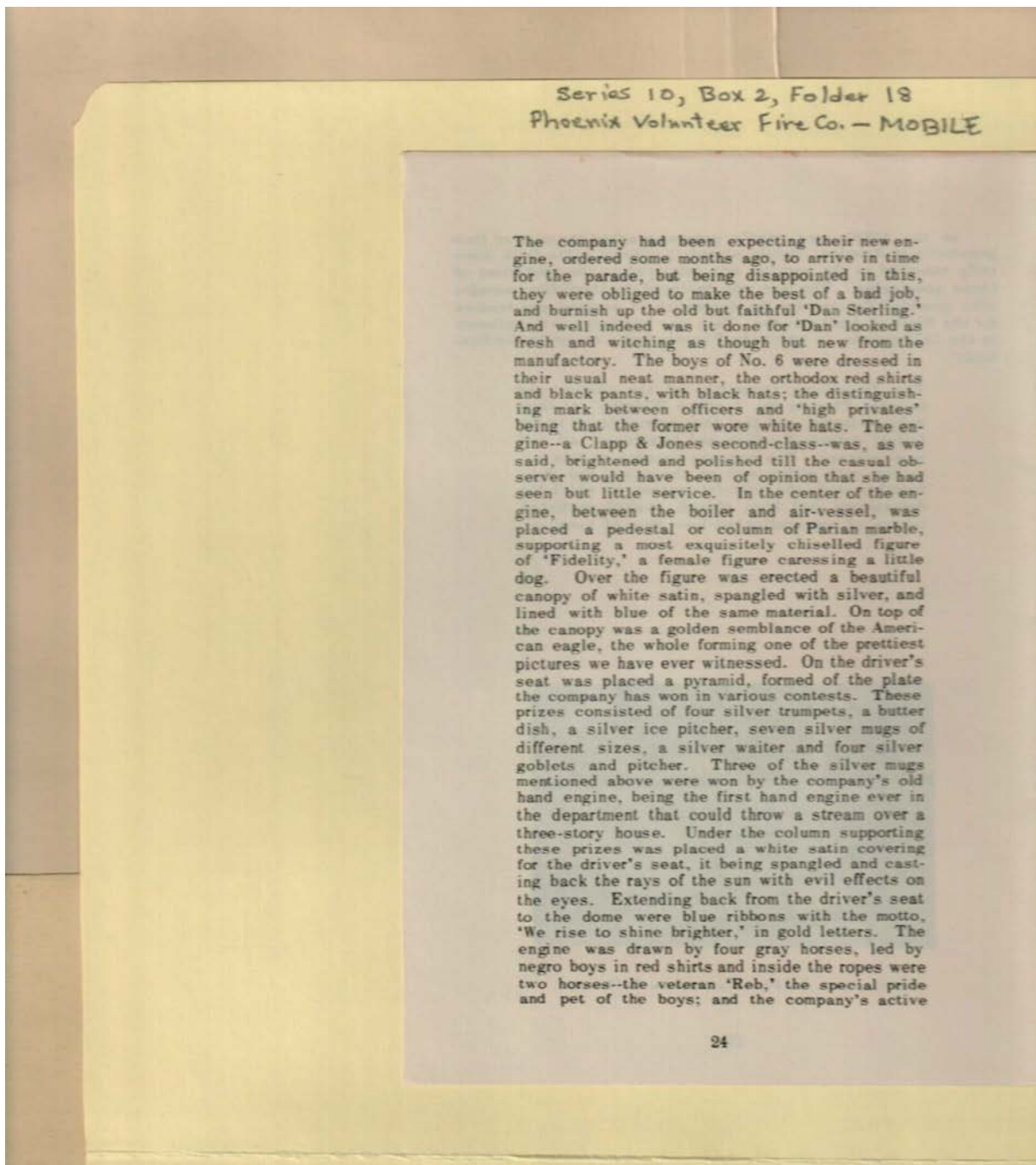
Helmets in the Phoenix Museum Collection

Names:

Helmets from
Phoenix Ballroom

Types:

photograph



Names:

Clapp,

Jones,

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

truck horse. 'Reb' has been in the possession of the company since 1866, and is now nine years old; for a life devoted to duty, the members of No 6 propose to give him his 'bed and board' free for the balance of his natural life. In color, he is a sorrel, and was ornamented with a collar of blue and gold, bearing the inscription 'Nine years in service' on it. On his back was placed a red and white leather girth, with his name upon it. 'Reb' has become so familiar to our people



Silver Trumpets in the Phoenix Museum Collection

that it were repetition to write that he bore his honors with no small degree of pride, but seemed to feel the responsibility of his position and to understand how to preserve it. In the coal box of the engine was placed an eagle clasping in his talons the American flag, the design being a present from Creole 9 of the Crescent City to Phoenix No. 6. A column of marble placed in the smoke stack held up a beautiful double hoop of flowers.

Names:

Trumpets from
Phoenix Ballroom

Types:

photograph

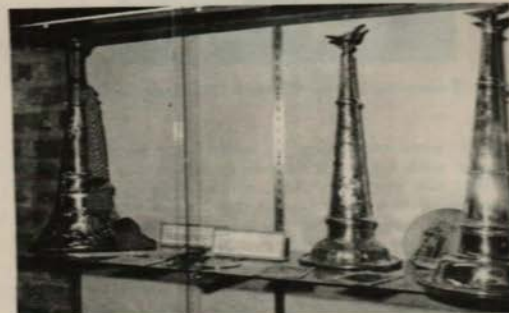
Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

enclosing a magnificent bouquet. Pendent from the prizes on the seat, and reaching to the silver lamp on the air vessel, was a broad blue ribbon, with the motto of the company, 'We rise to shine brighter' on it. Placed on the foot-board was a large basket of natural flowers, a remembrance to the boys from Alderman Walsh.

The company was furnished with excellent music by Wintergerst's band.

Immediately following No. 6, in carriages, and seeming conscious of the honor bestowed upon them came the Mayor, Aldermen, Common Council and City Officers; the President and Delegates to Fire Department Association, the Board of Fire Commissioners, the Ex-Chief and Assistant Engineers, the President and Secretaries of Insurance Companies, and the Agents Board of Underwriters.

Before the parade, the members of No. 6 were supplied by Mr. Wm. O'Connell, at the Theatre Saloon, with a little stimulant to help them bear the fatigues of the march. Thinking the effects of O'Connell's medicine had worn off, when the halt was called Mr. Dumas, Marshall of the company, invited them down to his restaurant, to



Names:

Dumas,
O'Connell, William

Trumpets from
Phoenix Ballroom

Wintergerst,

Types:

booklet

photograph

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

partake of a variety of substantial and delicacies and after the parade the same gentleman besought them to taste a magnificent dinner he had prepared in the Opal building.

The 1876 parade was an opportunity to show the new engine:

Phoenix Steam Fire Company No. 6 was headed by Gass' Gulf City Band, with their new Jeffries Engine, drawn by four grey horses, each horse led by a colored boy, and with 55 men on the ropes, dressed in their uniform of red shirts, trimmed with black cording, black pants, and black fire hats and belts, the hats with a red shield, on which was a metal '6,' and the belt bearing 'Phoenix' in metal letters on the back part. Every man on the ropes, and from the 'XVth amendments,' who led the horses, marched with the air and tread of true firemen, every face beaming with pride at the deserved admiration which from all sides greeted the 'Little Beauty,' the happily chosen name with which they have christened their pride and joy. The engine, which was built for Phoenix's boys by Mr. Jeffries, of Pawtucket, R.I., is probably the handsomest finished engine in the South, and the Decorating Committee, with discriminating taste, wisely concluded that the perfect machinery and high finish of their engine would be her best adornment, and so put their trust in rotten stone, oil and muscle until the shine of her nickel plate and brass made the proud motto of the engine 'Resurgam Lucidior' seem a truism. The additional decorations were as follows: Upon the driver's seat was a dais covered with satin and silver fringe, which formed the base of a pyramid of silverware, pitchers, salvers, goblets, fire trumpets, a handsome fireman's silver hat, etc., trophies of the company, won in contests of skill and activity, and generous rivalry. In the dome of the engine was a large and beautifully made pyramid wreath of artificial flowers. From this wreath to the driver's seat, on each side of the engine, was stretched a broad white ribbon, on which, in gold letters, was the motto of the company, 'We Rise to Shine Brighter.' The eight suction brackets around the engine

Names:

Jeffries,

Types:

booklet

Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

were ornamented with gilt balls, on each of which was perched a small silver eagle. Inside the company's ropes marched the company's two horses, 'Reb' and 'Ramie,' the former being an honorary exempt member after ten years of active service in the company.



Some of the members of Creole No. 9, of New Orleans, were the guests of Phoenix No. 6, and joined them in the parade.

After the parade Phoenix No. 6 exchanged the compliments of the season at Andy Woodcock's when they marched up to Langdon hall, where the young firemen and the honorary members renewed their fellowship over a dinner set by Smith & Dumas, which was spread in the good style and excellent taste which characterize these popular caterers. After dinner they accepted the invitation of Neptune No. 2 to 'go and see' Mike Curtin, and reciprocated by introducing Two's boys to the Ruby. After which they marched home and were dismissed.

And the next year, 1877:

Gracefully mounted, and looking every inch a marshall, Capt. R. C. Kennedy headed this old stand-by--Phoenix 6, as marshall of the day. In a handsome phaeton, the President and ex-President followed, and after them, ten carriages, containing honorary members. Next, were a number of honorary members, marching four abreast. Following these, was the magnificent steam engine, drawn by twelve horses, of whom

Names:

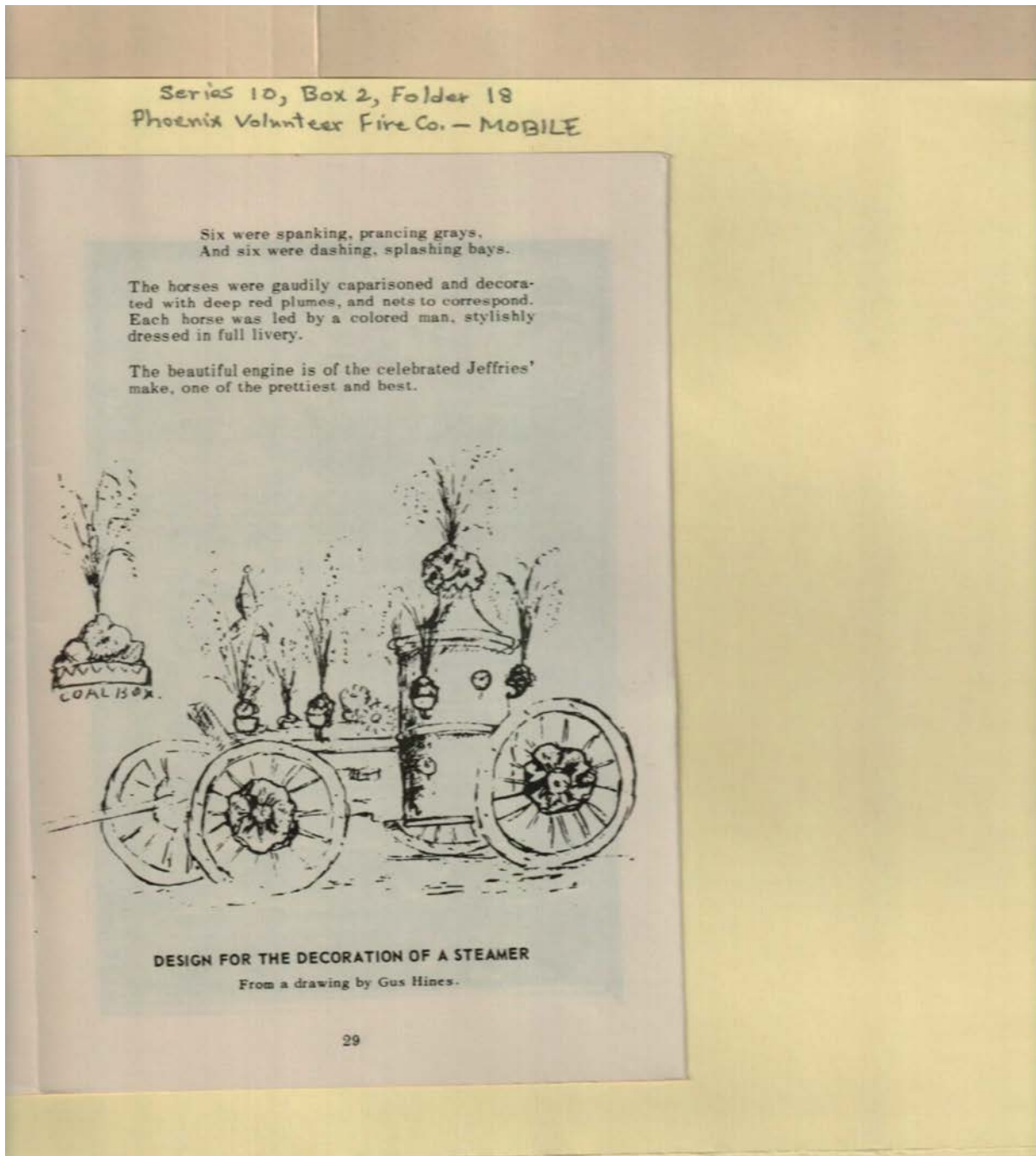
Curtin, Mike
Dumas,

Kennedy, R. C.,
Captain

Smith,
Woodcock, Andy

Types:

booklet



Names:

Hines, Gus

Jeffries,

Steamer Decoration

Types:

booklet

drawing

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18

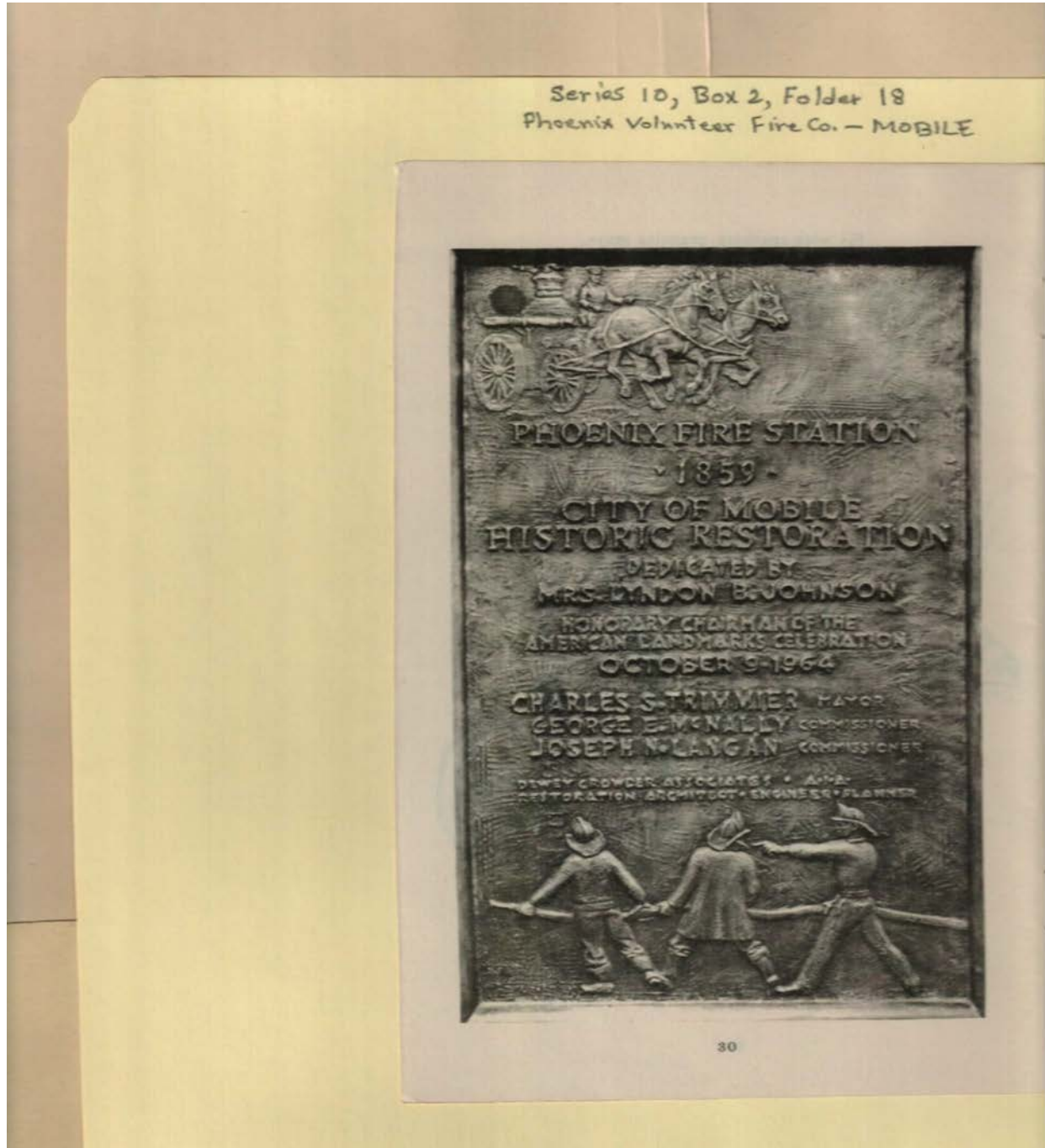
"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

Image 37 r10_02-18-000-0143

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Names:

Crowder, Dewey
Langan, Joseph N.

McNally, George E.
Phoenix Fire Station

Trivvier, Charles S.

Places:

Mobile, AL

Types:

plaque

Dates:

Oct 09, 1964

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Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. — MOBILE

Sixty-two members were in ranks, all handsomely uniformed, with red shirts, black pants, white belts and black hats. Upon the front of the shirt was the figure '6,' and on the hats the same, the latter in silver. The truck horse 'Ramie' and the old veteran 'Reb,' marched proudly within the ropes. This was the eleventh turnout for 'Reb.' No. 6 was headed by the magnificent Jaeger Brass Band, from New Orleans.

Engine decoration.--Upon the seat of the engine was a pyramid of silver, consisting of a silver fireman's hat, weighing three pounds, trumpets, butter dishes, cups, pitchers, etc.--trophies won by the company. Surmounting this pyramid was an arch wreath of artificial flowers. On each side of the engine were three arch wreaths of artificial flowers, and one of the same kind at the rear. In each suction bracket was a gilded ball, while a larger one was seen resting upon the smokestack, surmounted by eagles, holding in their mouths the ends of streamers, which extended to the signal lamp, upon which was engraved the motto of the company: 'We Rise to Shine Brighter.' The engine wheels were newly painted of a deep red, appropriately striped with gold. A large basket of natural flowers graced the coal box. The ornamentation of their engine, as well as the entire get up, of this fine company was tasteful and exquisite.

A beautiful silver card basket was presented to the company by Creole No. 9, of New Orleans, which was placed upon No. 6's engine.

Before joining the parade, No. 6 punched with Messrs. Young and Wm. O'Connell. During the halt they partook of a collation and punch at the Waverly Exchange, as the guests of Neptune No. 2. Also, during the halt, they partook of punches at Woodcock's parlors, with their gallant marshal.

After the parade, the company repaired to their dining hall, where they partook of a sumptuous dinner. An abundant flow of soul characterized the occasion, to say nothing of the bountiful provision of delicious edibles.

Names:

O'Connell, William

Young,

Types:

booklet

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Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. - MOBILE

The parades continued in the same style for the next ten years. In the 1880's however, other social activities became popular. "Grand uniform and prize" picnics were given at Frascati, the pleasure resort just south of the city on the shores of Mobile Bay.

The upper floor of the new station was a ballroom, and the newspaper indicates that it was in frequent use, as in 1883:

Members of Phoenix Steam Fire Company No. 6 gave a grand soiree at their hall last evening. The attendance was large and the dancing enjoyed. The ballroom was not deserted until a late hour.

Excursions by boat to the landings on the eastern shore of the bay were also popular. The steamer would leave the wharf early in the evening. There would be a hop at Howard's or one of the other hotels on the eastern shore, and the return to the city would be over a moonlit bay.

Parades, picnics, balls, and hops were great fun, and the fire companies were flourishing, but all was not well with the Department. Prosperity and popularity brought great political power, and corruption. The intricacies of local politics need not be gone into, but the results were that the Fire Department fell into a state of near anarchy. Hose was cut at the fires, rival companies fought in the streets as buildings burned, and finally the station of one company was burned by another. By 1887 public faith had been so shaken that the newspaper heading of the account of that year's parade was a cynical "Saint Fireman's Day."

The city determined to abolish the volunteer companies and institute a paid department. This brought on new violence, but under the leadership of Matt Sloan, longtime foreman of the Phoenix company, the change was accomplished. Sloan had been Chief Engineer of the Fire Department for a number of years, and he now took over as the first chief of the paid department. From 1888 to 1901 he served in that office and created the present fire department of the city. After 33 years of service to fire protection in Mobile he was privileged to die as he probably would have chosen-- of a heart attack while racing to a fire.

The Phoenix station was taken over by the paid department and used until about 1926.

The motto of the old Phoenix Volunteer Fire Company, "I Rise to Shine Brighter," was fully justified when in 1964, a hundred and five years after the beautiful fire station was erected, it was moved and restored. The building had seen sad days and was abandoned. Fortunately, however, no real violence had been done

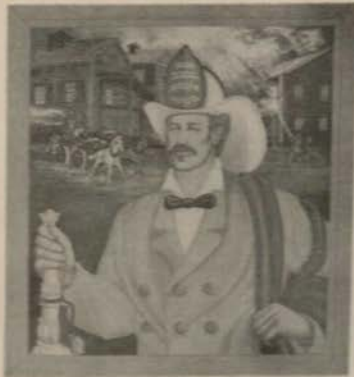
Names:

Sloan, Matt

Types:

booklet

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Phoenix Volunteer Fire Co. — MOBILE



MATT SLOAN

From a painting by James Wallace.

to it. The original doors had been lost and the interior had been partitioned, but otherwise it had retained its basic form. The original trophy cases were still in place in the old ballroom on the second floor, and one could still step through floor-length windows onto the balcony as firemen and their ladies had done a century before.

The wheel of time came full circle for the Phoenix on October 9, 1964, when the wife of the President of the United States, Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, dedicated it as a museum of the City of Mobile.

Names:

Johnson, Lyndon B.,
Mrs.

Sloan, Matt
Wallace, James

Types:

painting

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 2, Folder 18
"Phoenix Fire Company," 1967

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Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection

Preferred Citation: Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection, Archives and Special Collections, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, AL.

Collection Scope and Content: The Collection of 114 Linear ft. includes a total of 156 Archival Boxes. The Frances Cabaniss Roberts collection covers the historical records of the Cabaniss Roberts family. This collection contains extensive correspondence records of the Cabaniss Roberts family circa 1830 to 1930.

Archives/Special Collections Access Restrictions: None

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