

# On the Bookshelf

by Tom Scott

The history of the Houston, Texas Fire Department has been chronicled in two large (11" x 9 1/2") 244 page hard cover, album style pictorials. The first volume, [A Pictorial History of the Houston Fire Department 1895-1980](#), published in 2012, was authored by retired Houston firefighter, Scott Mellott, and his co-author Stacy Jones Slone III. The follow-up volume, [The Pictorial History of the Houston Fire Department 1980-2014](#), is the work of Scott Mellott and was published in 2014. There were numerous contributors to both books.

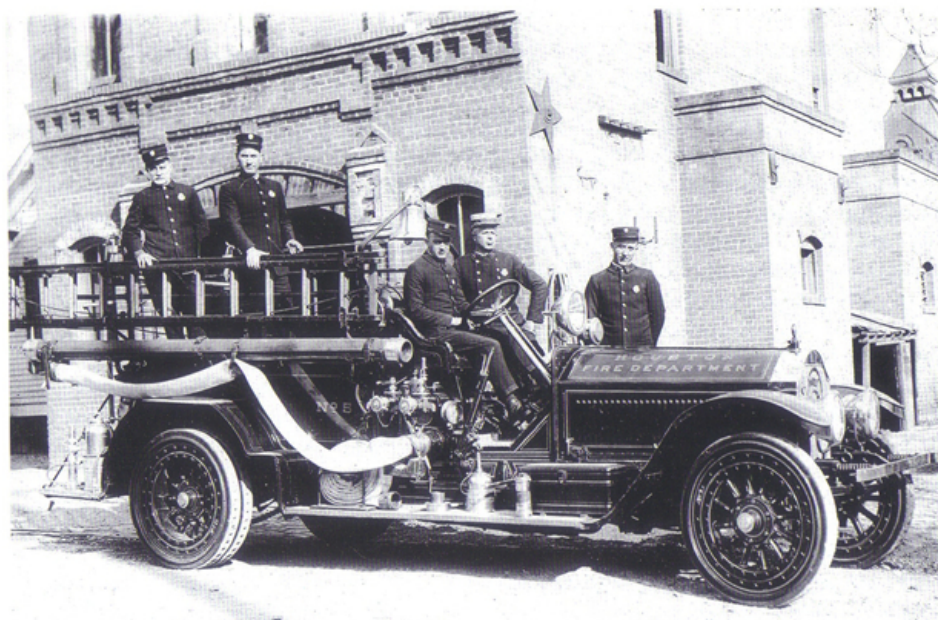
The format for both books provides a chapter for each decade. Each chapter starts with an introduction discussing the highlights. A box lists the fire chiefs and the Line of Duty Deaths. Pictures of firefighters, fires, and fire apparatus are shown for each decade. Many of the photographs are large full page or one page plus part of the second page. The shots in the first volume are black-and-white, whereas, all the pictures in the second volume are good quality color.



Houston Chief's Chemical Car. Photo courtesy Scott Mellott.

The selection of the photographs must have been a monumental effort. There are many personnel photos of companies in front of the firehouse and/or apparatus with each of the fire fighters identified by name. Most of the fire ground pictures give the date, occupancy, number of alarms, and other significant information of interest to fire service literature readers. Because of its geographic location, its petroleum related industrial base, and its large population and land area, Houston has had many "big ones," and most of these fires are shown in large photographs. Illustrating the variety of the HFD Big Ones is the Mykawa train wreck (1971) in which two tank cars containing chemicals exploded, the Amoco Virginia ship fire (1959), and the Texas City explosion and fire (1947) to which the HFD responded.

In the early years the HFD primarily bought American LaFrance and Seagrave apparatus. In the 1940s there was a shift to Mack, and later to Ward LaFrance and other makes. Some apparatus are identified by manufacturer and some by year. One piece, which is seen regularly on the fire ground in the early years, is a 1912 American LaFrance Water Tower. Originally horse drawn, the tower was motorized in 1918 and was used until 1960. It is now owned by the Houston Fire Museum.



Houston's 1923 American LaFrance engine. Photo courtesy Scott Mellott.