The foregoing includes the names of some of Jacksonville's foremost citizens. A number of these companies developed considerable political influence; at one time the Mayor, Chief of Police, Marshal, and several City Aldermen held membership in the Mechanics, and it is said owed their political positions to that fact. In social life several of the companies held the highest place, and their annual hops were considered the most important social function of the year. When the fire department gave its annual parade, it was witnessed by the entire population of the town. The make-up of one of these (in 1882) was:

Americus Hook and Ladder Company; 16 men; uniforms, red shirts, green helmets, and black pantaloons; they drew a fine new truck.
Mechanics Steam Fire Engine and Hose Company; 22 men; uniforms, red shirts, red helmets, and black pantaloons; brightly polished Silsby engine and hose jumper.
Jacksonville Cornet Band, 12 pieces.
Alert Hose Company; 14 men; uniforms, blue shirts, red helmets, and black pantaloons.
Aetna Hose Company; 16 men; they drew a new Silsby hose carriage.
Duval Fire Engine and Hose Company (colored); 22 men; uniforms, red shirts, red helmets, and red pantaloons; they drew an old-fashioned hand engine and nearly new hose jumper.

On account of the failure of the city to provide proper quarters for some of the fire companies, interest in the organization began to wane. In September, 1883, the Americus Company threatened to disband and did withdraw for two months. On January 6, 1884, the Alert Company was disbanded by the City Council for the refusal of the company to respond to a fire call, but within a week the Cleveland Hose Company was organized and took over the apparatus of the Alert Company. An effort was then made to increase interest in the department by putting it on a partially paid basis, and by providing more satisfactory quarters, and there was to a certain extent a revival of interest, until a disastrous fire in December 1885, showed plainly that the time had come for a regularly organized paid department.

After weeks of discussion the City Council, on May 4, 1886, authorized the establishment of a paid fire department. A Board of Fire Commissioners was constituted, a special tax levy of 5 mills was authorized to perfect the establish-