

CHARLES BERNARD RUPPE. ALBUQUERQUE'S FIRST  
PAID FIRE CHIEF.

By Herman R. Bishop  
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A photo of "The Albuquerque Fire Company," a hook and ladder company was taken in front of the Montezuma Saloon, dated 1882. The Saloon was located at the SW corner of Railroad Avenue (Central Avenue) and Second Street.



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**The first Albuquerque Fire Company, 1882  
Montezuma Saloon at 2nd St. and Railroad Ave.  
The Town of Albuquerque prior to incorporation  
in 1885. Hand-drawn ladder wagon**

From the 1880's to the turn of the Century in 1900, Albuquerque's Fire Department was all volunteer. Several people had served as Volunteer Fire Chief. Bernard Ruppe served several terms as Volunteer Fire Chief prior to the turn of the Century.

The first paid Fire Department in Albuquerque was formed on June 6, 1900. Bernard Ruppe was the first paid Fire Chief. He was a local Pharmacist and businessman. He was of German ancestry and was born in New York City in 1863. He died in 1937 at the age of 74. According to his obituary he was regarded as one of New Mexico's most prominent citizens. He was listed as a practicing Pharmacist in the State of New Mexico at the time of his death.

Ruppe came to Albuquerque in 1880. When the Militia was formed in Albuquerque during 1882, Ruppe was mustered into the first Militia Company of New Mexico. He served in the Army during the Pershing expedition into Mexico and was appointed to Major in 1906. In many stories and articles written about Chief Ruppe he is referred to as the "Major." He founded a drugstore here in 1883. Major Ruppe served in the New Mexico Territorial legislature and was a member of that body in 1907. He also served 25 years on the New Mexico Board of Pharmacy.

During the late 1970's representatives from the New Mexico School of Pharmacy contacted then Fire Chief Arthur Martinez to work out an exchange of an original photo of Chief Ruppe, which had hung in the lobby of Fire Station # 1 for many, many years (at Eighth and Silver Avenue SW). They gave the Fire Department a first quality reproduction of Chief Ruppe in exchange for the original. Members of the School of Pharmacy were researching the history of Pharmacy in the State of New Mexico. They labeled Bernard Ruppe "The Father of New Mexico Pharmacy."

In addition to the many titles Mr. Ruppe held, Pharmacist, Major, Fire Chief, he was active in many Civic affairs as well. He was the First Exalted Ruler of the Albuquerque Lodge, B.P.O. Elks, was the past Chancellor of the Knights of Pythias and was Council Commander of the Woodmen of the World. Active in fraternal and civic organizations, Major Ruppe was a leader in all the organizations to which he belonged. He was of forceful character and was a natural leader.

Mr. Ruppe was a court interpreter and spoke Spanish fluently. The Spanish-speaking people knew him well and came to him for their ailments and pharmacy needs. His hobby was mining and he put thousands of dollars in exploring prospect holes throughout the State.

Bernard Ruppe came to New Mexico shortly after the arrival of the railroad in 1880. He began as a clerk for E.V. Kent, a pioneer New Mexico drug store owner. In 1883 Mr. Kent built a drugstore along the railroad track and also became the first Postmaster. He appointed young Ruppe as an Assistant Postmaster. At that time Albuquerque had a population of only 3,500 people.

During 1883 Mr. Kent sold the Old Town drug store to Bernard Ruppe. In 1892 the Cosmopolitan Drug Store was moved to Railroad Avenue (Central Avenue). Three months later it burned to the ground. This started Mr. Ruppe's interest in firefighting. He was elected to five terms as Chief of the Volunteer Fire Department. Chief Ruppe was successful in getting the City of Albuquerque to purchase the first fire wagon for \$1,000 and established the first fire alarm box system in the streets of Albuquerque.

On June 6, 1900 the Volunteer Fire Department came under the management of the City. Mr. Ruppe became the first paid Fire Chief and his salary was \$100 per year. Two full-time firemen were hired at the same time, Eugene Southerland, and Tony Ortiz, their salaries were \$65 and \$60 respectively per month.

In 1964 the drug store carrying the Ruppe name was moved to Fourth Street and Hazeldine SW under different ownership. Today the Ruppe name is still on the front of the drug store.

Prior to 1900, Chief Ruppe served several terms as volunteer chief of the Albuquerque Fire Department. On June 6, 1900 the Mayor and City Council established the first paid fire department. Chief Ruppe was the first paid Chief (part-time) and his salary was \$100 per year. After serving 2 years as Fire Chief, Mr. Ruppe resigned from the Fire Chief's job

Sources: AFD handwritten journals, 1900, 1901, Obituary Bernard Ruppe, 1937, Letter Dr. John Ruppe, NYNY, 3-29-1979, Albuquerque Journal, 5-22-1983, P-E-7, "Ruppe Pharmacy." University School of Pharmacy, 1979.



**Bernard Ruppe, (Circa 1890)**  
**First paid Fire Chief of Albuquerque**

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