

HISTORY OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT, CITY OF ST. LOUIS

The History of the Metropolitan Police Department, from its meager beginning in 1808 to its present status today, is a story of service, leadership and integrity. It is also a story of the courage and dedication of thousands of men and women who have worn the uniform throughout the years. What follows is a brief chronology of how the Metropolitan Police Department evolved from a four man militia in 1808 to its present status as a nationally recognized law enforcement agency.

In 1808, just five years after St. Louis became a part of the United States, the city's first police force was organized. Although only comprised of four men, it served the early settlers well. There was no salary paid to the officers. Every male eighteen or older was required to serve four months as a police officer each year. Anyone who refused to obey his call to duty was subject to what was then considered a stiff fine - "the sum of one dollar."

For 10 years this rotating four-man militia served the needs of the settlers, but in 1818 it was necessary to enlarge the force to six men due to population growth. Two of the officers were then assigned to the night watch. One of them was Gabes Warner, a one-armed man who was considered by many to be better qualified for the job than most two-armed men. At the same time, Mackey Wherry was named Captain and was paid \$400.00 annually. Wherry held two distinctions, as he became the first command rank officer of the force and the first officer to receive a salary.

As the city began to grow, it again became necessary to increase the size of the force. In 1826 the city appointed a Captain and 26 new officers who were given the rank of Lieutenant. Their duties included ringing of church bells at 10 p.m. during the summer months and 9 p.m. during the rest of the year. From all accounts, this ritual was considered quite important and failure of an officer to do so would result in a fine or even dismissal.

The population in St. Louis increased rapidly, and in 1839 the department expanded again. Officers struggled to preserve the peace at night and 16 city guards were hired to assist police on night duty. The proclamation of the hours of the night was one of their most important duties. "Twelve o'clock and all's well" was a familiar call at that time.

Citizens better understood the importance of a strong police force in the 1840s when thousands of immigrants began to settle in St. Louis and crime increased faster than the size of the police force. With its growing population and increased steamboat traffic, the city was no longer the small trading post it had once been. The levee area was full of

people all hours of the day and night and police had their hands full as saloons, gambling and prostitution flourished along the riverfront. The "Wild West" had come to St. Louis.

In 1846 a major reorganization took place and the police force became known as the "Department of Police." Again, emphasis was placed on making the city safer during the evening. The night watch alone consisted of a Captain, six Lieutenants and 48 Officers. In contrast, the day watch had only one Lieutenant and seven officers.

By 1850, the geographical city limits had grown substantially with the west boundary of the city extending to what is now Broadway. Officers could no longer walk prisoners to the local jail and needed an alternative method. From this need, the "Black Maria," a wagon enclosed by iron bars was born.

In 1861, control of the police department was assumed by a police board appointed by the governor. During this period, other large cities had switched to the same system with success, as it removed a level of politics and favoritism from the police department. Today, the Metropolitan Police Department, City of St. Louis and the Kansas City Police Department are the only police departments in the country that still operate under this system. Due to this reorganization and change in state statute, 1861 is considered to be the inception of the Metropolitan Police Department as we know it today.

Soon St. Louis was the nation's eighth largest city and in 1861 had a population of 161,000. The Civil War had started and many in the bordering state of Missouri were forced to align with either confederate or union supporters. Members of the police board were troubled by this choice and each member subsequently resigned or was removed by the governor for failing to remain neutral.

In 1861, James McDonough was sworn in as the department's first police chief. McDonough did not seek out the position, but was considered the best qualified as he ran a successful private detective agency. Throughout his history with the department, McDonough would resign twice and serve three separate terms as the Chief of Police.

The Civil War brought about many changes for the police department and city as a whole. In 1866, St. Louis had a population of 204,000 and employed 225 officers charged with patrolling the 16 square miles of territory. The city had quickly become a center for river traffic and consequently steamboat criminals. Many men traveling by steamboat joined forces to commit piracy along the St. Louis Levee. The problem became so widespread the department implemented a steamboat detective squad to combat crime. Each steamboat captain paid the department \$1.00 in exchange for an officer being assigned to the ship while it was docked. By all accounts, this relationship worked to reduce crimes occurring on the docked boats.

In 1867, then-Chief William F. Finn implemented the first mounted patrol. Though the city boundaries extended only to Jefferson Avenue, there was significant crime just beyond the border as thieves would rob farmers and merchants who were on their way to

the city to sell goods. Mounted officers began to patrol the outskirts of the city in an effort to combat these crimes.

1881 brought about one of the most important advancements in the history of the police department. In October of that year, the first police telephone system was installed. Although it was a crude form of dots and dashes, the system enabled the districts to be connected by wire to one another, as well as to headquarters. As this new form of communication improved, it revolutionized law enforcement.

In October of 1903, Allen W. Wilkinson and Andrew J. Gordon were the first African-American men appointed to the police department as Probationary Police Officers. They were assigned as special officers and were not allowed to appear in police uniform. Officer Wilkinson was dismissed from the police force on October 16, 1903, over a complaint from a saloon owner, but was reinstated in 1906.

By 1904, St. Louis was the nation's fourth largest city and had a population of just over 575,000. The 1904 World's Fair showcased St. Louis to the world. For seven months of that year, St. Louis became the most popular city to visit, with almost 20 million people attending the Fair during that time. While the Fair placed the city in the spotlight, it brought with it unique problems for the police department - problems it had never experienced before. The force at that time consisted of 1260 officers with additional emergency patrolmen who were sworn in to meet the demands for police service at the Fair. While millions of people traveled to the Fair, so too did gamblers, swindlers, pickpockets, thieves and robbers. Though the department did a commendable job controlling the crime at the fair, they mourned the loss of three officers killed during a shoot-out with train robbers. No single incident has caused the death of more officers.

In June 1907, William W. Crockett and Ira L. Cooper (3) were appointed as Probationary Police Officers. Cooper was the first and only African-American to attain the rank of Sergeant in 1923. He was also the Department's first African-American Police Lieutenant.

The Roaring Twenties brought increased crime in the city. Various gangs were formed throughout the city and protecting citizens become difficult and dangerous. From 1920-1930, 46 police officers died in the line of duty. It was the deadliest decade in the history of the department.

Still, the 1920s brought positive changes as well. The Police Band was organized in 1920 and a new Traffic Division, consisting of 122 automobiles and 44 motorcycles, was created in 1923. Forensic ballistics was adopted in 1928 and a new headquarters and academy complex opened in 1929. Recruits at the new academy were trained for four weeks in areas such as patrolling, target practice, first aid, calisthenics, geography, spelling, penmanship, boxing and swimming.

In 1930, the Department began its own radio station, KGPC and 50 patrol cars were equipped with receivers. New district station houses were built throughout the decade.

Police report writing began in 1930 and the police lab was established in 1935. By 1936, 22 policewomen were on the force, and the Traffic Division boasted 228 automobiles and 91 motorcycles.

The Police Library was organized in 1947 and had since developed into the largest Department-owned library in the nation. In 1951, policewomen were given the power of arrest and received full status as police officers. The Mobile Reserve Unit was introduced in 1957. In 1958, the Canine Unit was initiated and it is now recognized as one of the best in the country.

The 1960s and 70s were periods of major transition for law enforcement in general and the Metropolitan Police Department was no exception. The 40-hour week was adopted in 1963 and air conditioned cars were first purchased in 1968. Education and training of personnel was the rule rather than the exception. In 1970, 640 hours of training became the requirement for successful completion of the academy.

Colleges became inundated with police officers, and again our department was one of the first in making scholarships available to police officers. Today, the department pays for part of each officer's tuition and offers incentive pay for degrees earned. By 1978, the first officer had earned a Ph.D. In 1979, the Hostage Response Unit was formed.

The 1980s brought their own unique problems to the Department. A declining budget, less manpower and additional requests for police services were but a few of the problems faced. The department met these demands with technological innovations such as the Police Incident Reporting System (P.I.R.S.), Computer Aided Dispatch (C.A.D.) and an automated fingerprint system (A.F.I.S.), as well as a new, state-of-the-art communications center.

Special programs were instituted to fight specific problems, such as the WAR program (We Are Responsible), designed to educate schoolchildren about the dangers of drugs, and SCAT (Street Corner Apprehension Team), to stop drug dealers on the streets. The CAT program (Combat Auto Theft) discouraged auto thieves by placing special decals in automobile windows.

New performance appraisal and promotion procedures were implemented, including assessment centers designed to provide unbiased, comprehensive means of rating promotional candidates. A new Fitness Center was dedicated in 1987 to provide a place for officers to keep in shape with handball and racquetball courts, a banked running track, Nautilus and Universal fitness machines, weights, a basketball court and a sauna.

Entering the 1990s, the department converted its twelve district patrol stations into three new Area Command Stations to provide a more efficient means of policing our city.

In 2001, Mobile Data Terminals were installed in all patrol cars to speed up the transfer of information. The department purchased ruggedized Panasonic laptops with state-of-

the-art touch-screen displays. These are the same laptops chosen by the Missouri Highway Patrol and numerous other law enforcement agencies around the country.

The Department purchased 165 new police vehicles in 2002. Of that number, 130 were used as marked police vehicles and 35 were unmarked. Ninety-two cars were assigned to the three area patrol stations, while the remaining vehicles went to Traffic Safety, Mobile Reserve and Canine. In this same year, the department purchased new Beretta 92 DG's to give its officers more advantages in their war against crime.

In 2005, the department took a vital step in updating its technology. The department unveiled a 40,000 square foot laboratory which strengthened the department's ability to process DNA, blood, drug traces, firearms and other crime scene evidence.

In 2008, the Metropolitan Police Department unveiled its latest state-of-the-art crime fighting tool. The Shotspotter Gunshot Location System uses sensors to detect the sound and location of gunfire. Within 15 seconds of gunshots, 911 dispatchers are alerted of the address closest to where the gunshots came from. The system also determines how many shots were fired, and pinpoints whether the shooter was in the front, back or on the side of the building and whether the shooter was moving or standing still.

Today, the department has more than **1800** employees, all who work to make St. Louis a better and safer place for the millions of people who live, work, or visit our city.

In addition, officers, many of whom have advanced degrees, patrol in customized police vehicles and have at their disposal the latest equipment in police technology, including computers and miniature radios. Hundreds of officers are involved in community programs designed to help distressed youth, provide safety education, and various other community interactions to support and assist the community beyond law enforcement.

After celebrating the department's 200th Anniversary in 2008, the Metropolitan Police Department looks to the past with pride and to the future with anticipation and promise. Regardless of the progress made in technology and science, there still remains a link - a common bond - which reconciles the Department's past with the present. That link is the thousands of police officers and civilian employees who have remained undaunted since 1808 in dedicating their lives to serve the citizens of St. Louis. The cornerstone of the department is not found in its buildings or technology, but instead is imbedded in the spirit and soul of its officers. As our city continues in its urban renaissance, the spirit of St. Louis prevails in its police department

Portions of Department's history was extracted from "In the Line of Duty: St. Louis Police Officers Who Made the Ultimate Sacrifice" by Barbara Miksicek, Stephen Pollihan and David McElreath