

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

by CHARLES L. BATES

In writing the history of the Police Department, it is not necessary to go back a hundred years to the time when Constable Solomon F. Morse posted the Selectmen's warrants for town meetings at each of the public meeting houses of the town and at James R. Sproat's store near the Tremont Iron Works, nor to the time when Lewis Churchill, Charles F. A. Weston, Job M. Briggs and Timothy Swift composed the town's constabulary.

And yet it might be necessary to go back a few years and within the memory of most of us when such men as James W. Hurley, John Holland, James C. Clark and some others stood between the Town of Wareham and violators of peace, good order and the law.

Mr. Hurley, being a Deputy Sheriff of Plymouth County, was endowed with more authority than that of the ordinary constable and police officer. In writing of him, the Historian says: "Deputy Sheriff James W. Hurley of this town (Wareham) has called, 'Hear ye, Hear ye' and the rest of the formal warning as Court Crier in Plymouth County for so many years that he has outlived every judge, lawyer, court clerk and officer who was attached to the Plymouth County Bar when he received his first appointment in 1882. In 1927 Court Crier Hurley was 78 years of age and still on the job." Before his death in 1935, he had added more years to the service. Jim Hurley, as he was called by his townsmen, performed good and faithful service to the Town of Wareham as constable and guardian of the peace. He was extremely conscientious, careful in detail, not afraid of danger, and a terror to all evil doers. We miss him.

Before the appointment of a Chief of Police by the Board of Selectmen, it was the custom of the town to elect at each annual town meeting nine constables selected from the various sections of the town for a term of one year. This custom continued for several years.

In the year 1917, the Selectmen appointed Mr. Elwell H. Smith as Chief of Police and made him responsible for all matters properly coming under

the police department. Mr. Smith had previously served as Chief of Police in Plymouth and had had considerable experience in correctional institutions. Under him as Chief, Harold P. Champion was selected to serve with him as patrolman. The nine constables elected were John Holland, Herbert H. Barrows, Frederick L. Benson, Charles O. A. Besse, John R. Campbell, Henry S. Burgess, Charles W. Hackett, Fred L. Harvey and Charles F. Robbins. Mr. Smith was also appointed as constable. The salary paid him for his services was \$28 per week and that paid the patrolman was \$24.50. He was also paid for the use of his automobile, as no car had been furnished by the town.

Under his regime at various times different constables and patrolmen were added. Among them may be mentioned John E. Hennessy, Delbert C. Keyes, Charles C. Ransom, Myron W. Baxter, Chester A. Churchill, and William J. Slater and Lewis Lynch as spare men and for traffic duty. Later, Leroy C. Besse, C. Frank Carr and Howard W. Bradley were added and the 44 members composing the Home Guard were made Special Police officers.

The work of the department was gradually increasing, owing to the growth of the town and the extra call for members of the force for various duties. The number of arrests had increased six fold over the number in 1917, and the appropriation for the department had increased from \$3,000 in 1917 to \$11,000 in 1928.

Delbert C. Keyes, who had rendered good and faithful service for some years, resigned to accept a more lucrative position in the State service. Mr. Smith's services ceased in December, 1928. The Selectmen, in writing of his services during the former years, stated that a most satisfactory showing had been made and the moral conditions of the town were well upheld.

In the year 1928, the Selectmen, having in mind the Bible injunction of "Let him who standeth take heed lest he fall", and believing that next to Godliness come good roads and an efficient, courteous police force, ap-

pointed Chester A. Churchill as Acting Chief of Police because they had faith in his unquestioned character and in his familiarity with police work. Later he was appointed as Chief of Police and Constable, was sworn to the faithful performance and entered upon the discharge of his duties. That their faith was well grounded is shown by the fact of his serving his twentieth year as Chief and his direction of the efforts and activities of his subordinates in their various duties.

Under the organization of 1929, Myron W. Baxter, William J. Slater and Charles A. Dean were appointed patrolmen. Mr. Baxter continued to serve until his resignation in 1932. Mr. Slater continued to serve until he reached the retirement age of seventy, serving well and faithfully and leaving a good record behind him. An outstanding event during his service was the rescuing of Victor Girard from the fire in the Courier Building, bringing him down the stairs. Victor was a cripple and used to pedal himself around in his wheelchair. Mr. Slater was a familiar figure on the Main Street of Wareham, directing traffic. Even in severe storms, he was there with his rubber boots, raincoat, and sou-wester. Charlie Dean served until his resignation on account of ill health in November, 1940, patrolling mostly on the streets of Onset.

In 1930, Chester H. Morse was appointed patrolman, making four in number. Morsey, as the boys call him sometimes, is also a Court Attendant and a good one. Clifton F. Keyes was also appointed Clerk of the Department during this year. In 1932, Raphael Gallerani was made a patrolman to fill the position left vacant by Mr. Baxter, resigned. It was during this year that Lester N. Chace was struck by an auto and killed while directing traffic as a police officer near Parker Mills on Elm street. We miss his smile and hearty chuckle. In 1934, Mr. Gallerani was made Sergeant of the Department and Mr. Keyes went on as a patrolman, still retaining his position as Clerk.

In 1937, Myles H. Brown was added to the patrolmen and has continued to serve faithfully since that time with the exception of about 2 years in the armed service on leave of absence (1942 and 1943).

At the annual town meeting in March 1938, the town voted to accept the provisions of Section 49 of Chapter 31 of the General Laws, for the purpose of placing the Chief of Police under Civil Service. This insures tenure of office during good behavior.

In 1940, following the resignation of Officer Dean, Earl S. Whiting was appointed as patrolman and continued to serve with credit to himself and to the department until 1942, when he resigned. In this year Mr. Keyes was appointed Prov. Sergeant. A two-way radio was installed this year which is a great help in keeping the office and the two cruising cars in close relations as to transpiring matters.

In 1943, Thomas J. Reidy was added to the patrolmen and Clifton F. Keyes became Sergeant. In 1945, Frederick J. Vecchi and Sherod L. Bourne were added to the patrolmen and continue to serve at the present time.

It is quite difficult to follow the personnel of the department, as many have been drawn from the Reserve list or from the Intermittent force to fill in when and where needed. At the present time there are a number of men held in reserve, who perhaps have not been mentioned in the foregoing list.

The last list published contained the following names, viz: J. Ellis Maxim, Richard H. Hogan, Bert Melloni, James Holmes, Jr., James Tonge, Felix H. Kiernan, Benjamin M. Westgate, Howard Bradley, George A. Frazer, Charles O. Buck, Raymond Pezzoli, Otto Kumpunen, and Harry Austin. The last two named have died since the list was printed.

Some of the other men who were on the Police force and entered the armed forces were Raphael Gallerani, Sherod L. Bourne, Bert Melloni, Benjamin M. Westgate, Carlton M. Washburn, Thomas Reidy, Jr., Frederick Bumpus, Wilbur McArdle and Daniel O'Connell. The Chief served in the First World War.

At the fall election in 1944, the town voted to accept the provisions of Sections 26 to 31H, authorizing the town to establish a contributory retirement system for its police department. This system is handled by the County of Plymouth and certain sums from the respective salaries of the police officers are deducted weekly

and remitted to the Treasurer of Plymouth County. The town also appropriates a certain sum annually for the fund. This system enables the officers to retire if disabled, or, after having served a certain number of years and reached a given age, and to receive a certain proportion of their former salaries.

In 1933, the Police Department was thoroughly housed in the New Memorial Town Hall Building, occupying the rooms on the S. W. side of the building, with the detention rooms for males and females directly beneath. The department is like an institution, come to stay. Some might say that it is rather an expensive institution, but no more so than other departments of the town. What if the appropriation has grown from \$11,000.00 in 1928 to \$36,000.00 in 1946? Other departments in town have increased in like proportion—the schools, public welfare and highways. If it is a far cry from the time of the nine constables, we must remember that the town is rapidly increasing in population and more and more demands are being made upon the Police Department. As one of our Selectmen wrote some years ago, that Wareham in the winter is like a town, but in the summer like a city. Then bear in mind that the number of arrests made in town has increased from 55 in 1917 to 596 in 1946, more

than tenfold. So don't let us say that the police are taking it easy and following the lines of least resistance. Its members are on duty by day and by night, at the office, on the street, in the court, at the theatres and other places of amusement, wherever people congregate and need their protection. The trend of the times with its juvenile delinquency, and the increasing crime wave is also making more and more demands upon our police force for investigations. Then further, the Police Department is assisting the Board of Assessors yearly in listing poll taxes and the owners of dogs. They are also assisting the Board of Registrars in the preparation of its street list by filing cards containing the names, occupations and ages of the inhabitants.

So, in summing up, let us not allow ourselves to criticise them whenever a store is entered and a safe removed. Police officers cannot be everywhere at the same time. They are not ubiquitous. They are just human, same as we are. May we not forget that it is much easier to criticize than to suggest a remedy. So, let's pat them on the shoulder and give them a word of praise for the good that they have done and lend our cooperation with theirs for a better, more peaceful and safer Wareham.

Hurrah for the Police who are leading the parade!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Wareham Police Association wishes to express its appreciation to all those who have helped to make its Annual Dance a success.

MYLES H. BROWN, Chairman
SGT. RAPHAEL GALLERANI
SGT. CLIFTON KEYES
CHESTER MORSE
THOMAS REIDY
FRED VECCHI
SHEROD BOURNE
ELLIS MAXIM