

Police Kept Pace With Village

By LARRY EVOE
Staff Writer

Crime was almost non-existent in the early day of the village of Birmingham.

Except for an occasional chicken thief the police or town marshal, as they were known in those days, had little to do to earn their pay.

Sole rights of exercising police power in the village went with the privilege of wearing

the "Marshal's" badge. The pay for the job was little or nothing, the hours of work uncertain and there was no police station.

HOWEVER, when any of the early marshals had a prisoner the back room of the national Hotel was often used.

An iron pipe supported the ceiling, its lower end imbedded firmly in the floor. Tramps, vagrants, thieves and other "undesirables"

were placed on exhibit in this room after the marshal discovered that a handcuff would fit nicely around the pipe.

The first Birmingham marshal was Alanson Partridge, who was appointed to the post on May 9, 1864. Partridge, who later served as Oakland County treasurer, was marshal until 1884.

Early records indicate he also served as justice of the peace during his marshal's term.

FROM 1884 until 1887 Samuel

C. Mills was the marshal. He was replaced by the famous Jim Beattie, under whose administration it is believed the town's first murder took place.

On June 14, 1888 farmer Levi Allen was killed by a gentleman named Young in an argument over a piece of property. Although no record can be found of what happened to Mr. Young, it is known he was made to stand trial in Pontiac.

In the early days the office of

marshal was frowned upon by the village council.

DURING ONE period in 1892 Almeron Whitehead paid Marshal George Fay a dollar a day out of his own pocket to protect the town.

Like the fire department, library and other municipal offices that the village of Birmingham had in its early stages of growth, the police department also adopted the old Baldwin Public Library building at Maple and Woodward as its home.

In 1919, a group of villagers asked Homer F. Gaskill if he would be interested in taking the position as the town's first chief of police.

Gaskill also acted as milk and dairy inspector, sanitary inspector and sealer of weights and measures. His department was made up of himself and two men.

THE DEPARTMENT was equipped with one motorcycle and a village-owned pickup truck. The chief received \$150 a month and the patrolmen \$140.

The department grew over the years and in 1948 when Ralph W. Moxley, the present chief took over, it consisted of 20 men. Moxley was the fifth man to serve as chief.

Today the department has a total personnel of 39. It operates seven cars, two three-wheel motorcycles, one dog truck and a sign maintenance truck.

All of the cars are equipped with three-way radios, first aid equipment, blankets, fire extinguishers and fares.

A 29-MAN auxiliary department made up of volunteer citizens supplements the regular force.



BIRMINGHAM'S EARLY law enforcement department had to depend on the sturdy legs of the town marshal to get to the scene of a crime. The 1964 version operates seven patrol cars and a motorcycle and motor-scooter for parking enforcement. A call for help can be answered in a matter of

seconds as all the vehicles are equipped with three-way radios. Lt. Delyce Service (left) is in charge of the patrol division. Police Chief Ralph W. Moxley (right) heads the 39-man force.

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FROM HORSES TO HORSEPOWER

All The Town Answered Fire Bell

By DICK ZEMMIN
Staff Writer

"Fire!" came the cry, as a young boy raced down Saginaw Trail (now Woodward) to the fire hose tower or W. Maple to sound the alarm.

The large tower bell tolled the warning and a handful of volunteers pulled out the hose cart while others ran to Daines and Bell funeral home to borrow a pair of horses.

THIS WAS Birmingham's fire department in 1910, a far cry from the powerful, well-equipped engines that roar out of the city's two modern fire houses today to combat blazes in a matter of minutes.

Birmingham's fire department has played an integral part in the city's growth from a rural agrarian settlement that received travelers on horseback to today's thriving center.

It was in 1910 that Birmingham had its first resemblance of a fire department. At that time, anyone who was available and could contribute help, joined the force. The department was located just east of Dunn's Camera Shop and consisted of a tower to dry the hose and one horse cart.

But the actual department dates back 51 years to 1918, when it was organized on a volunteer basis under its first chief, James Cobb.

VOLUNTEER WORK was by no means fun. Especially when members had to pay a \$5 fee and 10 cents a month dues. The organization was set up on a fraternal basis.

In 1918 Cobb resigned and William G. Olsen held the position of chief until 1930. The same year Cobb resigned, the department obtained its first piece of motorized equipment, a chemical truck nicknamed "June Bug" because of its appearance.

On July 7, 1933, the Field Building Fire, in which the City of Pontiac had to pump water from

the Rouge River to Birmingham's trucks, revealed the need for a pumper. The Village of Birmingham purchased one to replace the 1914 Republic.

The growing organization required more space. City Commissioners headed a \$68,000 drive and built a new station on the East Wing of the Municipal Building in 1926, which the department moved into three years later.

ON JULY 1, 1927, Birmingham started its first paid department, consisting of four paid men and 24 volunteers. Present Assistant Fire Chief Stanley Pepperell was a member of the original force.

Olsen retired in 1930 and V. W. Griffith was appointed chief, a position he held until 1955 when Park H. Smith took over the reigns.

Birmingham firemen, in their spare time, helped increase their stock of equipment by building their own.

After purchasing a Dodge Power-Wagon and a LaFrance pumper, the department added another Engine in 1950 to put the City of Birmingham in the 5th Class of fire insurance rating.

At that time, Birmingham was the only city in the U. S. in a population class under 10,000 to have such a rating.

BESIDES BUILDING their own ladder truck and booster, the firemen used their hall as a depot during depression days for families to get food and clothing.

The most tragic moment for the force occurred on Dec. 11, 1949, when the Jones Antique Shop fire on North Woodward resulted in the death of fireman Lee Carroll, the only fatality in the organization's history.

In 1954, Ladder 12, with a 75-foot aerial ladder was purchased, and, one year later, the department moved into its present station at Adams and Chestnutfield.

The Chestnutfield station is dedicated in Carroll's memory, while the Adams station has been dedicated to Chief Olsen.

Chief Smith retired in 1963 and George S. Scott became chief. He has now served in that capacity for 15 months.

The present 37-man department answers an average of about 400 alarms a year. The force trains its own men and sends 10 a year to University of Michigan for an extension course.

THE DEPARTMENT'S equipment has grown from a hose cart to two pumpers and two ladder trucks, a rescue truck, a civil defense unit, emergency generator, pickup truck, chief's car and fire marshal's car.

All but the generator are equipped with two-way radios. As the department enters its

51st year, only four members of the original volunteer group are still living. They are Stanley Todd, Harry Johnson, George Spencer and Ernest Gardner.

In addition to fire-fighting duties, the department has had control of Birmingham's water supply since 1932.



BIRMINGHAM'S FIRE department has come a long way from the first hand-drawn carts used back in 1910. The department's newest engine, Ladder #34, is pictured above with some of the members of the present 37-man crew. The engine, an American LaFrance Quint with a 750 GPM pump and a 75-foot aerial ladder, was purchased in 1961.

It is stationed at the Adams Station. Standing in front of the truck are (from left) Second Assistant Chief Stanley Church, First Assistant Chief Stanley Pepperell and Fire Chief George S. Scott. The current Birmingham staff has a total aggregate of 413 years of service and an average of 11 years and two months of experience.

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