Police Kept Pace With Village

BY LARRY YNOE
Staff Writer

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

Except for an occasional case of the police on the town marshal as they were known in those days, had little to do with them.

Sole rights of exercising police power were in the village with the privilege of wearing the "Marshall'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 record that the national register was often used.

An old sign reported the keeping of the officer in the town, a window in the corner, a window in the front of the building. Then as now, vagrants, thieves and other "undesirables" were placed on exhibit in the room after the marshal discovered that a hangman would fit nicely around the pipe.

The first Birmingham marshal was Alanson Partridge, who was appointed to the post on May 8, 1964. Partridge, who later served as Oakland County treasurer, was marshal until 1981.

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

FROM 1844 until 1891 Samuel C. Mills was the marshal. He was replaced by the famous Jim Rennie, 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 1862 Alonzo 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 affairs 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 1910, a group of villagers asked George H. Gaskill if he would be interested in taking the position as the town's first fire chief. Gaskill also acted as milk and dairy inspector, sanitary inspector and assessor 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 pick-up truck. The chief received $50 a month and the patrolmen $30.

The department grew over the years and in 1946 when Ralph W. Moxley, the present chief took over, it consisted of 26 men. Moxley was the 50th man to serve as chief.

Today the department has a total personnel of 26. It operates seven cars, two three-wheel motorcycles, one dog truck and a sign maintenance truck.

All of the cars are equipped with two-way radios, first aid equipment, blankets, fire extinguishers and flares. Those who assist in fighting fires.

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

BIRMINGHAM'S EARLY law enforcement department had its share of the sturdy legs of the town marshal to get to the scene of a crime. The 1864 version operates seven patrol cars and a motorcycle and motor-secor 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. Delby Service (left) and the first aid equipment, blankets, fire extinguishers and flares.

FROM HORSES TO HORSEPOWER

All The Town Answered Fire Bell

BY DICK ZEMMIN
Staff Writer

"Fire!" Slide the cry, as a young boy raced down Saginaw Trail (now Woodward) to the fire house lower on Maple to sound the alarm.

The large bell tolled the warning and a handful of volunteers pulled out the hose cart while other men ran to Daimer and Bell funeral homes to borrow a pair of horses.

THIS WAS Birmingham's fire department in 1910, a far cry from the fire department of today, which operates two three-story buildings that rear 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 to a municipal community. The department and its members have rescued thousands of lives and property since its inception.

It was in 1822 that Birmingham had its first resemblance of a fire department. At that time, someone who was available and could contribute help, joined the force. The department operated out of Daimer's Camera Shop and consisted of a driver to tow the hose and one hose cart.

But the actual department dates to 1862 and 1866, when it was organized on a volunteer basis under the change Over.

VOLUNTEERS were key to the success of the department. Especially when members had to pay a $3 fee and 10 cents an hour to join the unit. The same set up was used on a fraternal basis.

In 1910, the fire department's first fire engine was purchased and the first hose cart used back in 1910. The department's second fire engine was also purchased and the second hose cart used.

In 1954, a third fire engine was purchased and a second hose cart used.

In 1964, Ladder 12, which was the last of the three fire engines, was purchased and a third hose cart used.

Chief Smith retired in 1963 and George S. Scott became chief. He has now served in that capacity for 35 months.

The present 27-man department answers an average of about 600 alarms a year. The force trains its own men and sends 10 a year to the University of Michigan for an extension course.

ON JULY 1, 1977, Birmingham started its first paid department, consisting of four paid men and 24 volunteers. Present Assistant Chief Stanley Popperwell was a member of the original force.

Olsen retired in 1930 and V. W. Griffin was appointed chief. He held the position until 1935 when Park E. Beal took over the reigns.

Birmingham firemen, in the past, spent time, helped increase the stock of equipment by building their own.

After purchasing a Dodge Power Wagon and a LaFrance pump, the department added another Engine to the force in 1956 to put the City of Birmingham in the 4th 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.

RESIDENT BUILDING their own ladder truck and hoist, the firemen used their own to a bell in a severe storm in 1990 to get furniture and clothing from the Rouge River to Birmingham's trucks, revealed the need for a pump car. The Village of Birmingham purchased one to replace the 1910 pumping car.

The growing organization required more space. City Commissioners headed a $600,000 drive and built a new station on the East Wing of the Municipal Building in 1939, which the department moved into three years later.

THE DEPARTMENT'S equipment has grown from a hose cart used back in 1910 to two pumpers and two ladder trucks, a rescue truck, a civil defense unit, emergency generators, 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 101st year, only four members of the original group are still living. They are Stanley Tweed, Earl Johnson, George Gepp and Charles Gaskill.

The department has had control of Birmingham's water supply since 1922.

In addition to fire-fighting duties, the department has had control of Birmingham's water supply since 1922.

BIRMINGHAM'S FIRE department has come a long way from the first hand-drawn carts used back in 1910. The department's present engine, Ladder #3, is pictured above with some of the members of the present 27-man crew. The engine, an American LaFrance Quint with a 750 GPM pump and a 500-foot ladder, was purchased in 1961.