

The Long Blue Line



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The Saint Paul Police Department's historical roots extend back to the mid-nineteenth century. At that time, the containment of crime and the maintenance of order became major issues of concern for the rapidly growing frontier community of Saint Paul. The appointment of William R.



William Miller

Miller to the office of City Marshall in 1854 heralded the birth of the Department. The new Marshall requested, and was authorized to hire four officers. However, there are no records of any actual hiring at this time.

It seems that, initially at least, the office of City Marshall bestowed several duties upon the appointee beyond "catching crooks." For example, the City Marshall was required to attend to the Common Council at their several meetings:

- to act as the Council's rental agent and general purveyor;
- to rent market stalls;
- to issue licenses for dogs, shows, liquor stores and billiard rooms;
- to impose fines for failure to comply with his mandates;
- to collect wharfage on steamboats; to keep the streets and sidewalks clean;
- to destroy squatter's shanties;
- and to select such lots at the cemetery as the burial of paupers might require.

An early edition of the Pioneer suggested an addition to the Marshall's civic duties: "The corporation ought to instruct to shoot every swine found in the street, after suitable notice to the owners, and thus settle the matter at once..." Finally, the Marshall was required to patrol the streets and be on hand for every passing brawl. For all these responsibilities, the Marshall received \$400.00 per annum and ten percent of all monies collected by him for fines and licenses.

With the beginning and early development of the Department came the first ethnic problem. During the late 1850s it was thought that some policemen should be fired and more Germans hired in their place. This would make the Department more representative of the community it served. The Council decided to leave things as they were, "as long as the coppers did their duty." As a result, the Department remained comprised of three Americans, six Irishmen, and two Frenchman.

Civil War Era

With the onset of the War Between The States in 1861, several changes occurred that greatly affected the young police force. The business life of the city slowed to a virtual standstill, and municipal services were reduced due to a lack of funds. The number of patrol officers was reduced significantly by military enlistments. Facing difficult times and a depleted police force,

the Council adopted a new measure in 1862 which disbanded the night police and replaced it with the "Home Guard." The Home Guard consisted of approximately 200 civilians who were divided into four companies, one for each of the city's four wards. Two men were paired up to walk a pre-assigned beat one night a month at no pay. This volunteer community service, known as "nighthawking," supplemented the remaining six policemen who patrolled the streets during the day.

The arrangement, while adequate, was temporary at best, and the city fathers realized this. Thus at the first Council meeting of 1863, a provision was made for a regular paid police department consisting of a Chief with a salary of \$600.00, a Captain at \$500.00, and seven Privates at \$480.00 per year. This, however, was considered only the first step. The Mayor, concerned over the coverage that these few patrolmen could provide, addressed the Council: " Two policemen are stationed on the Levee during the day and one at night. Two on Third Street by day and two by night. One above and one below the bridge (Wabasha Street); this exhausts the entire number. Robert, Jackson, and Minnesota Streets should have at least one night policeman. There should also be a watchman on Seventh Street and another on Fourth Street. These regular beats being established, the public, if they bear them in mind, will always know where to look for a policeman whenever disturbances in neighboring streets occur. The police, moreover, have stringent instructions always to wear their stars, so that they may be easily Identified ..." The Council responded to the Mayor's message by hiring three additional patrolmen and passing an ordinance prohibiting citizens from wearing a "police star" without authorization, upon penalty of a \$5.00 fine.

In an 1864 letter to the Council, the Mayor Initiated still another major change for the Department by calling for the creation of a Detective Bureau. The Mayor stated that, "...the office of the ordinary police is to prevent crime...of a detective to follow out secret clues and bring to light the perpetrators. it will not do to withdraw men from their regular beats and set them to trace out the intricacies of an ingenious robbery which may take days, and perhaps weeks, to unravel. While the men are thus employed, other robberies might, and probably would, take place In the neighborhoods of their described beats. It would be well known that the men were away and their posts unguarded. And thus crime so far from being diminished, would be increased." To facilitate the creation of a Detective Bureau, \$200.00 was appropriated by the Council.

The relative economic prosperity following the Civil War was reflected by the rising police salaries. in 1864, Chief Cleveland received \$600.00 for his services, while shortly after the Confederate surrender, Chief Turnbull collected an annual salary of \$1,000.00. The Department also grew in number, totaling 19 men in 1871. A more formal appearance seemed necessary, and so on June 5, 1872, the Department received its first uniforms. An appropriation of \$116.12 was used to purchase caps, belts, clubs, and badges. Individual officers were required to buy the brass-buttoned suits as well as their own revolvers. Shortly after the new uniforms came a new rank — that of Sergeant, created in 1872.

Despite the growth and improvement of the Department In its first 20 years, crime was still a frequent visitor to the waterfront in the late 1870's. Third Street was a common thoroughfare for theft and violence, while Second Street was the location of many low river dives and dance halls.

"Sharps" would often lay in wait for the "Tenderfoot" to relieve him of his money. St. Paul was known as a "dead tough town." No doubt the transient population and the half-lit streets were part of the problem.

The Golden Age and the Move into the 20th Century

The tremendous influx of population between 1870 and the end of the century brought rapid growth to the city and its police department. The 1880s became known as the Golden Years of the Department. With the flurry of new home construction and the expansion of neighborhoods came the laying of sewers, the paving of streets, and the development of a municipal water system. In order to cope with the changes induced by this growing metropolis, the Department found it necessary to modernize.

Modernization came to police communications in 1885 with the addition of a police patrol telegraph system of 32 alarm boxes. One year later, 15 sentry boxes with telephones were erected to protect the beatmen from the elements. The purpose of these boxes was to curb the officers' excuse of seeking shelter in the various saloons of their beats.

Another component of modernization was a need to decentralize the police force. Accordingly, work was begun on four police substations, which were opened on May 1, 1887:

- Ducas Station — located on the southeast corner of Robert and Delos Streets.
- Margaret Station — located at what is now 745-747 Margaret.
- Rondo Station — located at the southeast corner of Rondo (now Concordia) and Western.
- Union Park Station — located at what is now 490 N. Prior.

The cost of construction for the Ducas, Margaret and Union Park substations totaled \$8,922.00; while the Rondo substation was erected for \$2,678.00.

Prior to the advent of the substations, the Central Station was located at City Hall, Fifth and Washington Streets. From 1889 to 1911, it was located at 87 W. Third St. (now Kellogg Boulevard at Market). In 1911 it moved across the street to 110 W. Third Street and remained there until the 1920's when it was moved to the Courthouse. In 1888 the Department consisted of 160 officers who manned the stations, 120 of whom were patrolmen.

Compensation was changed during this era as well. By 1895, the Chief of Police received \$3,500.00 while a detective earned a salary of \$1,200.00. Patrolmen were at the bottom of the pay scale, earning only \$900.00.

Modernization became a realization for the Department as it moved from the 19th into the 20th century. This modernization was just a foretaste of what was to come.

Progress & Prohibition

In 1919, Minnesota Congressman Andrew Volstead authored the famous “Volstead Act,” which ushered in the phenomenal “Prohibition Era.” Police were placed in the middle of enforcing an unpopular and unenforceable law and crime and corruption were a natural by-product.

The Department attempted to proceed against illicit liquor in the usual ways, but found that it was difficult to obtain the necessary evidence for prosecution and conviction. The persistence of liquor traffic was evidenced in the number of drunks arrested each day. Many of the former saloons continued to do business, allegedly selling Near Beer and soda pop, but suspicions were aroused over their ability to pay high overheads solely on the proceeds of these sales. It appeared that the city had little control over these establishments until an ordinance was passed requiring businesses trading in foodstuffs and soft drinks to purchase a \$10.00 license. Utilizing this ordinance, a business could be refused a license or have an existing license revoked. The Department also formed a special force of detectives who became known as the “Purity Squad.” The squad’s duty was to investigate complaints “against moonshine parlors, disorderly houses, gambling dens, and other places under suspicion.”

The Department roster, at this time, consisted of 394 persons, including ranking officers, detectives, patrolmen, policewomen, chauffeurs, surgeons and clerks. The Chief of Police earned \$4,000.00 a year while a Sergeant earned \$1,800.00 for his services. Detectives earned between \$1,680.00 and \$1,920.00 while patrolmen earnings ranged from \$1,500.00 to \$1,680.00.

In addition to higher salaries the Department also sought to reduce the expenses an officer incurred as a result of membership in the Department. Pistols were purchased in wholesale quantities and sold to the officers at cost, in addition, winter wear regulations were modified which permitted an officer to purchase a sheep lined coat with mohair black shell and wombat collar for \$33.50. Previous to this, a fur lined overcoat with broadcloth shell which cost \$250.00 was required.

All police personnel during this era were under the civil service system, established in June of 1914, with the exception of the Chief of Police. Appointment to a permanent police position was made after successfully passing mental, physical, and medical examinations. In addition, the applicant was required to be no less than five feet, seven inches tall; not over thirty-five years of age, a citizen of the United States, a resident of St. Paul for at least six months, and a past record required to ‘bear close inspection.’

One of the more colorful members of the Department during the 1920’s was a detective by the name of James C. Murnane. Detective Murnane, who had a national reputation as a Bertillion expert, was in charge of the Department’s Identification Unit. He was said to have studied 100,000 of the 130,000 photos in the Bertillion Room during the course of 25 years of service. During a test of his prowess he repeated, without mistake, the names and records of 700 men who were chosen from the gallery.

Another officer worthy of mention during this time was a veteran of forty-five years on the job. An article of the times states: The oldest man on the St. Paul Police force is Phillip Gibbons who is still working for the Department to which he was appointed on January 4, 1874. ‘Phil’ Gibbons is an institution in St. Paul. He has been the subject of many newspaper stories and has

been known as 'The Pilot.' He wears No. 1 star and is 19 years old. Mr. Gibbons, who confidentially, expects to live to 100 years, is conductor of the workhouse van and has held that job since June 29, 1893. Despite his age, he guards the rear door and is on the job in the coldest and warmest weather. No man ever served any boss better than 'Phil' Gibbons served the people of St. Paul these many years."

A Unique Phenomenon: The Gangster

The City of St. Paul in the 1930's was an exciting, as well as dangerous, place to live. The Depression and Prohibition gave rise to a unique phenomenon of American life -- the gangster. The Department had to utilize every advantage to insure peace for the city, which in turn implemented several innovations that were new to policing.

In the year 1930, a number of events occurred which had significant impact on the Department's services. Fifty-four patrol officers were assigned to foot patrol; the non-fixable ticket came into being in June; and probably the most significant innovation occurred on June 21, at 1:00 a.m., when the one-way radio went into service.

In order to test the one-way radio concept, receivers were installed in various squad cars and tuned to KSTP radio. When a police call was to be broadcast the general programming would be interrupted and a gong sounded. The dispatcher would twice announce the location and nature of the call. The squad(s) assigned to the call would then proceed to the scene. Later, the officers would check back from the call using a phone or callbox to inform the dispatcher of their status. After the feasibility of the one-way radio was determined the Department operated its own transmitter. Sixteen squad cars were initially equipped with receiving sets. In 1935 Detective Units were supplied with radios to assist them in investigations in their districts and to enable them to answer police calls when necessary.

By 1939, the Department had progressed to the use of two-way radios. In July of that year, 26 squad cars were equipped with the new radios and the police transmitter, previously located atop the fire station at University and St. Albans, was moved to the top of the First National Bank Building to improve transmissions. The ambulance, patrol wagon, and 14 motorcycles continued to use the one-way radios.

The 1930's also marked a change in locale for the Department. In 1930 the construction of the present city-county Courthouse was completed, as well as construction on the present Public Safety Building. The contract for the "Roman Doric" styled Public Safety Building had been let in September of 1929. The structure had dimensions of 310 by 150 feet and cost \$485,632.00 to build. The Bureaus of Health, Fire and Police were transferred to the new facility, and on December 1, 1930 the police substations were closed and the St. Paul Police Department was again centralized.

During the 1930's St. Paul was a haven for the likes of John Dillinger, Homer Van Meter and the Barker-Karpis Gang. The Green Lantern, located at 10th and Wabasha, and the "Hollyhocks," on Mississippi River Boulevard, were night spots catering to these criminals. Kidnapping for

ransom became a frequent activity during this decade, especially for the Barker-Karpis Gang whose victims included William Hamm in 1933 and Edward Bremer in 1934.

On March 31, 1934 a St. Paul Police detective and a Federal agent went to 93 S. Lexington on an investigation and were met with submachine gun fire. The men inadvertently stumbled onto the hiding place of the notorious gangster, John Dillinger and his associates, who shot their way out of the building and escaped.

A few days prior to this, two officers drove their squad to the front of the Uptown Movie Theatre at Grand and Lexington in order to write reports. It was during the early evening hours and the poor lighting in the squad car prompted the officers to write their reports in the illumination from the marquee. While writing, they observed a man and woman approaching the theatre from Lexington Avenue. The man was acting strangely, placing one hand in front of his face each time he looked at the officers. The other hand he kept in his coat pocket. Thinking the man was ill, one officer approached the couple to see if he could be of assistance. The couple, however, disappeared into the theatre and the officer let the matter drop. Later, when news of the shooting on Lexington Avenue hit the newspaper, along with Dillinger's photograph, the officer was startled to discover that the man in front of the theatre that night was none other than John Dillinger.

In July at another movie theatre, the Biograph in Chicago, Dillinger was not as lucky and was shot and killed by federal agents.

Shortly after, on August 23, Homer Van Meter, a Dillinger henchman, was shot and killed by St. Paul Police officers in an alley at University and Marion Streets. His car was acquired by the city and pressed into service by the Department as a squad car. In the next few months other notorious gangsters were killed and captured by law enforcement agents, signaling the beginning of the end to the gangster era. It is ironic that in those declining years the Department was finally able to obtain Thompson submachine guns and bullet proof vests, items which had been a part of the gangsters' arsenals for some time.

The Quiet Years

After the glamour, excitement, and violence of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Department experienced 20 years of steady growth and relative social calm. Despite being labeled the "Quiet Years" of the Department, the implementation and evolution of new units, procedures, and technology continued to leave an indelible mark on the Department's operational structure.

To insure the safety and security of the community during World War II, the Department formed the Civil Defense Auxiliary Police, the Internal Security Division, and the Bomb Reconnaissance Squad. These units were disbanded after the war, but in 1950 the Auxiliary Police was reactivated.

A selective calling system was installed in some squad cars in 1950. This system enabled dispatchers to contact officers out of hearing range of their cars by remote radio transmissions

which activated the horn and/or red light. Due to maintenance problems it was phased out in 1970.

One of the reasons for phasing out the selective calling system was the development of hand-held personal radios. Eight “Pack Fones” were purchased by the Department in 1957. These radios could be powered by a variety of energy sources, including the DC electricity from battery packs or an automobile battery or AC household current. The “Pack Fones” were the predecessor to modern packset radios in use today.

The “Quiet Years” for the Department were just that — time to grow, time to experiment with new ideas and technologies and time to become accustomed to the post-war world. In retrospect, they were the calm before the storm of social unrest and phenomenal change encompassed by the 1960’s.

Riots, Demonstrations & Marches

The ten years between 1960 and 1970 represented a striking contrast to the quiet post-war years. The events of the decade seemed determined to surpass the infamy and violence of the 1930’s.

One of the most notorious crimes in St. Paul’s history occurred on March 6, 1963, when the wife of a prominent attorney was murdered in her Hillcrest Avenue home. The slaying touched off one of the most intensive investigations ever undertaken by the Department. After having been stabbed in the neck and severely beaten, the victim struggled to the home of a neighbor for help. The surrounding neighborhood was stricken with fear as the news of the incident spread throughout the area. As the investigation proceeded, the Department was thrust into national and international notoriety with the arrest and conviction of the murderer — the victim’s husband, T. Eugene Thompson. What began as a “perfect murder” ended with six people becoming implicated in the complex scheme. Three of the conspirators, including Mr. Thompson, received life imprisonment sentences for participation in the heinous act.

The late 1960s experienced a great deal of social turmoil. Dissatisfaction with the progress of civil rights and concern over the escalating war in Vietnam brought the problems many major cities were experiencing home to St. Paul. During the evening of August 30, 1968, violence erupted in Stem Hall of the St. Paul Auditorium when police officers attempted to intervene in a fight between patrons. An officer responding to the call for assistance was wounded by gunfire. The incident sparked a full-scale riot that rapidly spread to the streets, where large numbers of citizens hurled bottles, rocks and other debris at police lines. Extensive vandalism and property damage was reported from area businesses and private citizens in the area of the riots. The severity of the violence led to a total recall of the Department’s sworn personnel. After reinforcements arrived and the unruly crowd dispersed, rioting continued in the Selby-Dale area well into the early morning hours. The disorder continued for the next 24 hours, eventually resulting in the wounding of three officers by sniper fire.

The Department was viewed by many as a bastion of the Establishment’s power during these years, and police activities were often performed in an atmosphere of confrontation and distrust. As a result, relationships between citizens of the “Hill” area and officers remained tense in the

latter part of the decade. It was common to see several two-man squads respond to a parking complaint call, while more serious requests for police assistance resulted in even greater numbers of officers responding. Bulletproof plexiglass was installed in squad cars, supplementing the glass in the passenger area.

The Department implemented a Community Relations Office, originally located at 739 Iglehart and later moved to 632 Selby Avenue. The purpose of this unit was to establish a dialogue with citizens and arrive at solutions to real and perceived problems between citizens and the Department. Solutions were not easily arrived at, for a bomb was detonated in the rear of the building, causing damage to the building and a nearby automobile.

Another response to the changing times was the implementation of the Internal Affairs Unit by the Department. The Unit was established to address public criticism that the Department was not adjusting to the new era of civil liberty. The internal Affairs Unit investigated and reviewed citizen and Departmental complaints about officers' misconduct. Prior to this time, complaints against officers were investigated by the Personnel Officer.

Confrontation with police officers was not only condoned, but encouraged by many groups as a method for gaining publicity for their causes. A tragic example of confrontation occurred on May 22, 1970, when a young female contacted police operators during the evening hours for assistance at a Hague Avenue address. Officers Glen Kothe and James Sackett responded to the call, prepared to help an alleged expectant mother about to deliver her baby. Receiving no response at the front door of the residence, Officer Kothe proceeded to the back of the residence. While away from the front of the house, Officer Kothe heard the loud report of a gunshot. It was later determined that Officer Sackett had been struck by a high-powered rifle bullet fired from ambush in an apparent pre-arranged execution.

The public outcry following Officer Sackett's death was overwhelming. Outrage and shame were expressed from every area of the city as citizens rallied to the support of the slain officer's family. The funeral procession for Officer Sackett stretched approximately one mile as stunned citizens expressed their sentiments. The suspect responsible for the original call was formally charged and her trial produced a landmark decision from the United States Supreme Court by allowing the admission of voice print identification evidence in court.

Changes & Innovations

While the events of the 1960's reflected the difficult and sometimes dangerous task of maintaining peace in a turbulent society, the 1970's were a time of changes and innovations within the Department. On January 1, 1971, a reorganization occurred whereby "Bureau" was changed to "Department."

Several innovative programs were developed in 1971, largely due to monies received from foundation and government grants. In April of 1971, the "Take Home Squad Program" began with a grant of \$147,050. The program, which 103 officers participated in, was designed to deter crime through the visual presence of numerous police vehicles throughout the city. The program also provided assistance to on-duty officers in a crisis situation. On July 9, program participants

assisted in a robbery of the Western State Bank at University and St. Albans. An ensuing chase resulted in which two of the suspects were captured. The remaining two suspects took refuge in a private home, holding two hostages at gunpoint for seven hours. The off-duty officer participants appreciably diminished the necessity of using a large number of on-duty squads and thus taking them away from patrolling other parts of the city. The program, however, was terminated on October 1, 1972, due in part to an inability to measure deterrence in relation to the relatively high cost of the program.

The initiation of new programs continued in 1972. The popular 4/40 program was inaugurated whereby officers were assigned ten hour shifts instead of eight, thus creating a four day work week. The Field Referral Office was opened and a much needed liaison between the Department and the City Attorney was created.

The Communications Center was also upgraded in 1972, adding two additional operator stations and another dispatcher console. The city was divided into two sections, each of which could be dispatched on separate frequencies during the busy hours of the day. Also separated were the emergency and non-emergency dispatcher functions.

Team Policing was inaugurated in June of 1973, and was initially confined solely to the West Side where the effects of this type of policing could be evaluated. By using the same officers in assignments to a particular area, a high degree of familiarity with the community's resources and problems could be attained. A great emphasis was also placed on an improvement in Police Community Relations. The Team Office was located at the rear of the fire station at 33 Concord Street. The program proved successful and was expanded in July of 1977 to six team areas which would include the entire city. The A-1 Team Office was located at 919 Lafond; A-2 at 1280 Jackson; A-3 at 1720 E Seventh; B-4 at 1287 Ford Parkway; B-5 at 400 N. Western (later moved to 518 and then 418 Selby); and B-6 In the Downtown Airport Administration Building.

Grant money again aided the Department in 1976 when the radio system was significantly upgraded. New equipment was purchased which enabled a conversion from VHF to UHF. Frequencies were made available for sharing with other police agencies. Due to the modifications implemented, it was possible for officers to monitor all radio transmissions regardless of their origin. Previous to the upgrading of equipment, all communication had to be channeled through the dispatcher.

With the Public Safety Building bursting at the seams, additional office space was sought and became available in the old Public Works Building directly across the street at 100 E. 10th Street. After extensive renovation, the Annex was ready for occupation on December 22, 1976. A highlight of the renovation was the inclusion of a studio. The Department had adopted the use of video equipment in 1975, and with a studio, training material and Department advisories could now be prepared.

During the 1970's the Department achieved recognition not only for its innovative and new approaches to policing but for its personnel as well. In June, 1972, James Griffin became the first black officer to rise to the rank of Deputy Chief. In 1974 the International Association of Chiefs of Police, in conjunction with the nationally syndicated Parade Magazine, honored St. Paul

Police Officer Howard G. Skillings by selecting him Officer of the Year. The award, based on his outstanding record as a patrol officer and his dedication to helping disadvantaged children in his neighborhood, was presented in Washington D.C. by President Gerald Ford.

The 1980's

Budget constraints experienced by the city as a whole caused the Department to "tighten its belt" during the early 1980's and out of necessity some popular programs initiated during the 1970's were dropped. In 1982 Team Police came to an end when four of the six Team Offices closed. The city was divided into two sectors and offices at 1280 Jackson Street and 580 University Avenue served the new East and West Sectors, respectively. Also affected by budget cuts during this period was the Communications Center where civilian dispatchers were replaced by sworn personnel.

Despite the elimination of some programs, new ones were developed aimed at making the most productive and efficient use of available resources. In March, 1982, Tele-Serve was introduced. Low priority calls for service necessitating only a report were diverted to a special unit instead of dispatching a squad. Patrol officers were thus freed for high priority calls and citizens with low priority requests received prompt attention.

In December of the same year, the 911 emergency telephone system went into effect. This service allowed anyone within the Seven County Metropolitan Area to dial the three digit call number in a police, fire or medical emergency situation and automatically be routed to the appropriate operator/dispatcher. The origin of the incoming call was automatically identified, providing the operator with necessary information in the event that the caller was incapacitated.

January 30, 1984 marked a change in the process of becoming an officer in the Department. The traditional 21 week Academy was eliminated and a six week orientation course for incoming recruits was introduced. This change was a direct result of the licensing procedure adopted by the Minnesota Peace Officers Standards and Training Board.

And so now these officers, products of a new training process, take on their new assignments in the four new Teams serving the city. They, too, are now a part of the "Long Blue Line."