

Keeping the Law in Copley

As Copley moves toward its 200th birthday in 2019, the history of the Township is long and evolving. The task of keeping the law and civil order in the township fell to many; each a duty to perform. On July 5, 1819 during the formation of Copley Township government, Samuel Griffin and Joseph Bozworth were elected Copley's first constables. Elected as Overseers of the Poor were Levi Canfield and Jonah Turner. Parker Tyler and William Davis were elected Fenceviewers.

Disputes usually arose between farmers and fences. A farmer could not have the use of a fence along his property that was set by his neighbor unless he paid one-half the cost of the fence. To determine the cost, a fenceviewer was called upon. Other duties of a fenceviewer was to determine if a fence was a legal fence. That determination weighed in the fact that if it was installed "properly." This determination was needed when an animal broke through the fence ate the crops or killed farm animals. If the fence was legal, then damages would be paid for. If not, no damages could be collected. That law is still on the books. Only today, township trustees serve in the role of fenceviewers and actually had a case eight years ago.

Overseers of the Poor looked after the needs of any legal resident who fell on hard times. A legal resident had to live in the township a minimum of one year. On the other hand, the overseer made sure that any newcomer to the township brought with him, a strong work ethic. If it appeared that a newcomer still didn't have a job to purchase land; shortly before the year was up the overseer reported it to the trustees. The overseers would then direct the constable to order that person out of town.

Besides ordering people out of town, constables served writs for the justice of the peace, posted notices for the trustees, and conducted sales of household goods for the payment of delinquent taxes. Constables were elected every year. The last constable to serve Copley Township was Elmer Coon, who was also Copley's first fire chief. He was very popular and reelected a total of 32 times. He served from 1935 to 1966. Effective in his job, Constable Coon didn't need to exercise the heavy hand of the law very much. A good talking to and a ride home to face your parents, was all that a young person needed to straighten up. A passage in Copley's 1958 minutes book speaks of a father of three young men called into the trustees' meeting for a counselling about his sons' behavior.

Copley Police Department officially formed part-time in 1967 and became a police district in 1970 with sixteen-hour shifts during the day and early evening. In 1973, 24-hour patrols began. After Elmer Coon came Chief Raymond McElroy (1967-1976), Chief Gregory Maurer (1976-1990), Chief Walter Markowski (1991-1999), and current chief, Michael Mier, hired December 20, 1999.

The days of the constable are gone, but Elmer Coon's memory lives on in a dedicated display at the police department.