



A HISTORY OF THE HOLYOKE POLICE DEPARTMENT

During the 1850's, some one hundred and forty seven years ago, the Holyoke Police Department started with only a half dozen men with the organization of the town. This number increased as the size of the city grew, requiring more men to keep watch over its interests. The police station, or "quarters", were first located in the city hall and were soon deemed inadequate. The first Chief of Police or City Marshall, was a man by the name of William G. Ham, appointed in 1871. The stories of his individual prowess spread far and wide and probably kept outside troublemakers from coming into the town. Chief Ham served as City Marshal until 1882 addressing such problems as drunkenness, rowdies, vice and petty thievery. In 1874 the force consisted of ten officers and a chief. By the turn of the century it grew to forty-six members, including the Chief or Marshal, Assistant Marshal, one Captain, one Lieutenant, one Matron and forty-two Patrolmen. Almost all of the members of the force at this time were of Irish descent and all had Irish names.

In 1913 construction began on the City Hall Annex and on July 8, 1915, the Police Department moved into their new quarters. The new Annex Building quarters provided ample room for the department and the cell room, or lock up, was said to be second to none in the country. There were twenty-four adult male cells and six female cells with one juvenile holding room. In the same year the Detective Bureau was equipped with instruments and devices for the Bertillion System of identification (measurement of bones and body structure) as well as a complete filing and records system, which added considerably more work, but organized old cases where they could be retrieved almost immediately. This addition placed the department on par with other departments throughout the United States and Canada where the Bertillion System was being universally adopted. In 1924 the United States congress established the Federal Bureau of Investigation, combining this with the existing Bertillion files made the Holyoke Police Department one of the most up-to-date departments in the country.

Upon moving into the new City Hall Annex Building quarters, City Marshall John R. Harrington requested the addition of ten patrolmen for the patrol of the residential areas of the city, citing the layouts of the beats or post as being too large for one officer to cover properly. An assistant police matron was also requested as the number of females taken into custody averaged almost fifteen percent of total arrests. The force was bolstered to sixty-six men.



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In early Holyoke, liquor was the source of many problems, drunkenness was the most common vice and often led to acts which broke the law. After 1867 the state enacted liquor control laws which were changed from time to time and at one time removed. Having the option, Holyoke chose not to enforce state liquor laws. In 1857 there were some one hundred "Dram" shops (bars intended to sell small quantities of alcohol to be consumed on the premises). By 1870, with a population of less than eleven thousand, the town (under state prohibition for everything but beer and ale) counted eighty-nine liquor shops, with more rumored to exist. Courts did virtually nothing about liquor law violations, probably because they were fully occupied with cases stemming from social and economic maladjustment, thus almost all police action resulted from liquor law violations and the crime of drunkenness.

Prior to the advent of the automobile in police patrol work, a horse drawn "Paddy Wagon" (referring to the padded interior of the rear of the wagon...limiting injury to occupants) was housed in a barn at Suffolk and Railroad Streets. The driver of the wagon was on standby for calls for transporting those arrested (mostly for being intoxicated or disorderly). Communication with the paddy wagon driver, at the time, consisted of a bell being rung from headquarters located a block away.

During the 1920's the police station was equipped with one telephone with a three digit number and officers made contact with headquarters from call boxes located throughout the city. At one time there were approximately sixty-five call boxes by which each beat officer reported in to the station during his tour of duty. At this time the patrolmen worked a schedule of one day off in eight. In 1952 the forty hour week was instituted.

The department purchased its first automobile, a Ford, in 1930. Walking beats were assisted by tow cruisers, four motorcycles (Indian motorcycles manufactured in Springfield, MA.) and the horse-drawn "Paddy Wagon", commonly referred to as the "Black Maria" (a name which originated in Detroit, Michigan, due to the frequent transport of a woman, of "questionable means", who always wore black).



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In 1974, it was decided the Annex quarters no longer met the needs of the department and they moved to 165 Sargeant Street (a city owned building which was the temporary home of the Holyoke Community College). The dispatch, cellblock and Detective Bureau remained at the Annex Building. The department also had five satellite stations known as “Team Police Units” which were funded by grants from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

The Team Policing concept made the police more accessible to the public and officers were able to get to know the neighborhoods and the people on a more personal level. When the LEAA funding ran out the satellite stations were closed and the department once again moved into the annex building to centralize operations.

In 1980 the department moved into a brand new station which had been constructed behind City Hall. This building, unique in its design with parking for 78 vehicles on the roof, was touted as being an “ultra modern” facility... “one of the finest in the Commonwealth”. From 1980-1995 this “ultra modern” facility was plagued by water leaks. As the years went by ceiling tiles and walls had fallen, mildewed carpeting had to be removed, and continuous ventilation and electrical problems hampered operations. Due to the persistence of Local #388 of the International Brotherhood of Police Officers, court action resulted in Judge William Keating ruling that the building was no longer habitable and thereby forced the city to seek new quarters. The city began exploring several alternatives and eventually settled on new construction at 220 Appleton St.

Throughout the 1980’s policing concepts tended to isolate officers from the communities they serve, which can hamper crime control efforts. Seeking new ways to enhance performance and maximize resources, law enforcement leaders have struck a responsive chord across the nation with a variety of Community Policing initiatives. Community Policing allows law enforcement to get back to the principals upon which it was founded, to integrate itself once again into the fabric of the community and work on a collaborative effort that identifies problems of crime and disorder and involves all elements of the community in the search for solutions to these problems. Officers speak to neighborhood groups, participate in business and civic events, consult with social agencies, and take part in education programs for school children. Civilians, the Greater



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Holyoke Youth Service Corps (an Americorps program), manning community police neighborhood resource centers, coordinate and execute these activities with the police and community.

One very successful tool for Community Policing has been bicycle patrols which bring the police closer to the community. At present, the Holyoke Police Department has forty certified Mountain Bike Patrol Officers. The bicycle patrol is designed to be an aggressive, highly visible means of supplementing police patrol. These officers respond to calls for service, accidents, medical emergencies and assist the public with bicycle safety education and demonstrations. The maneuverability and stealth of the bicycle has led to numerous arrests while at the same time has proved to be an effective public relations tool which children relate to without hesitation.