

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Third of four columns

A police department's job is to keep order, and the decade of the nineteen twenties, the era of Prohibition, was unquestionably a particularly busy time. In addition to arrests for intoxication, there were a number of successful raids and subsequent confiscation of illegal booze: "So carefully had the raid [of May 17, 1922] been planned that everybody was surprised. . . . Arrangements were made for raiding, officers to be stationed at each place at 9 o'clock. . . . Although the amount of liquor discovered in some cases was not large, it was sufficient to constitute evidence of violation of the law." The proprietors of the establishments reacted in different ways. "In the Fiandach café an Italian gentleman in charge offered resistance (and) he pulled a knife. . . . In the Casey restaurant the man in charge announced heartily, 'Go to it. I'll go 50-50 on everything you find.' . . . and the officers found plenty." "One patron was inclined to be argumentative and wanted to be convinced that the officers actually had authority for the raid. He was speedily convinced." In the end, no arrests were made, but the people involved were served with orders to appear in Federal Court, and "all the liquor collected was confiscated by Sheriff Morse and transported to the Monroe County jail."

Earlier in the 1920's, there was a substantial "riot" in the village of Fairport, which involved about 40 or 50 men from Rochester and about 200 villagers. Seventeen Rochesterians were arrested and one man was killed. Apparently the riot was a result of an argument that had taken place during a dance the previous week. Ultimately sixteen youths were convicted, fined and sentenced to jail time. The issue of youth gangs was in the news again in the 1950's when there was a push to double the night force to two officers in order to deal with the youth gangs from Rochester. "Hoodlumism" continued to be a concern every now and then, as groups of youths seemed to congregate in various parts of the village such as the Sugar Bowl restaurant in the 50's and 60's and the Village Landing ever since its construction.

For the most part, however, local policing seems to have been involved mainly with issues of petit larceny, traffic infractions, and personal disagreements. For example, a "young girl reported that a boy had put snow in her face...Boy and his parents were talked to by patrol and parents will handle the matter....".... "Youngsters playing hockey in the street were sent over to use the skating rink;".... "received a report of a hit and run accident that demolished a tree. Patrol arranged for car owner and tree owner to get together and settle the matter" "not one but two trains broke down simultaneously and caused the main crossings to be tied up for 1 ½ hours....Patrol took care of traffic until the mess was cleaned up,"....."Patrol dispatched an opossum to the great beyond after finding it in a lady's garbage can." Occasionally, the police have dealt with crimes of a more serious nature. In 1979, a gunman armed with a rifle holed up in police headquarters and held off a SWAT team for eight hours. The standoff was resolved peacefully, but the incident dominated the news for several days.

During the 1950's the Fairport Police Department, which was located in a storefront building on South Main Street next to the municipal building, consisted of the chief, a sergeant, two officers, and two part-time officers. During their shifts, officers routinely patrolled the streets, followed school buses to ensure safety and monitored the 170 parking meters and the one and two hour parking zones. The remainder of the shift was taken up with investigating complaints, filling out forms, sending out notices of traffic violations and serving warrants. A 1958 report indicated 1057 parking tickets were issued that year and that the officers had responded to a total of 2919 calls. It was in the 1950's that the first women joined the police

force as crossing guards. Their uniforms were powder blue with “gold braid and buttons and matching blue caps, white shirts and gloves, and navy blue ties.” The uniform has changed, but the job continues to be of crucial importance to the safety of Fairport’s children.

The department has ten full-time officers, including the chief. All receive extensive training, including monthly in-service requirements and twice-yearly firearms training. Officers come to the force after six months at the Police Academy and about twenty weeks of field training. All officers are rigorously trained in what is known as “continuum of force,” the progression from verbal confrontation through the use of mace or the night stick up to the use of weapons. Two officers are on each eight-hour shift where they log approximately 30-40 miles patrolling the streets. In addition, the night shift checks village business locations. The small size of the department as well as the small area of the village makes it possible to respond quickly to calls, and unlike larger departments, the Fairport police continue to be available to check homes for vacationing owners.

In general officers would say that their job is “routine and often monotonous.” They also speak of it as both frustrating and very rewarding. In addition to a knowledge of the law, the job entails a good deal of paper work and numerous court appearances, but it also allows a certain amount of freedom that comes from being out on patrol and having to make decisions on one’s own. Common complaints include the strain that odd hours and emergency calls can place on family life and the hostility that is often directed toward the police. During all shifts, maintaining rapport with citizens and generally being seen and known are of crucial importance to success.

To be continued



Prohibition Raid

