

145539

**POLICE DEPARTMENT  
CITY OF NEW YORK**

**THE HISTORY OF NEW YORK CITY  
POLICE DEPARTMENT**



**RAYMOND W. KELLY  
POLICE COMMISSIONER**

**U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice**

145539

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted material has been granted by

New York City Police Dept.

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the copyright owner.

# The History of New York's Finest

## The Humble Beginnings

### The Dutch Era (1625-1664)

When the Dutch colonists first arrived on Manhattan Island, they found themselves faced with a harsh and often hostile frontier. Armed with hope and determination, these hardy settlers struggled daily with fear, hunger, sickness and poverty. They realized they had to establish a system of law and order, or their community would perish.

Relying on their European experience, they formed a council to make and interpret the law. The council then appointed a *schout-fiscal* - Dutch for legal officer - to see that its edicts were obeyed. It was the *schout-fiscal's* job to punish each lawbreaker in a manner befitting the crime. He served as both sheriff and prosecutor throughout New Netherland, an area covering what is now lower New York State and eastern New Jersey.

In 1651, the first professional police department was created in New Amsterdam - the *Rattlewatch*. It was a voluntary patrol composed of citizens appointed by the council. In addition to muskets, its members were equipped with the hand rattles that gave the fledgling police force its name. They strolled the streets to discourage crime and search for lawbreakers. In times of emergency, they noisily spun their rattles to summon assistance from

fellow *Rattlewatch* members. They also served as town criers, announcing the hours from 9 P.M. to daybreak at all street corners.

In late 1658, the eight members of the *Rattlewatch* began drawing pay, making them the first municipally funded police organization.



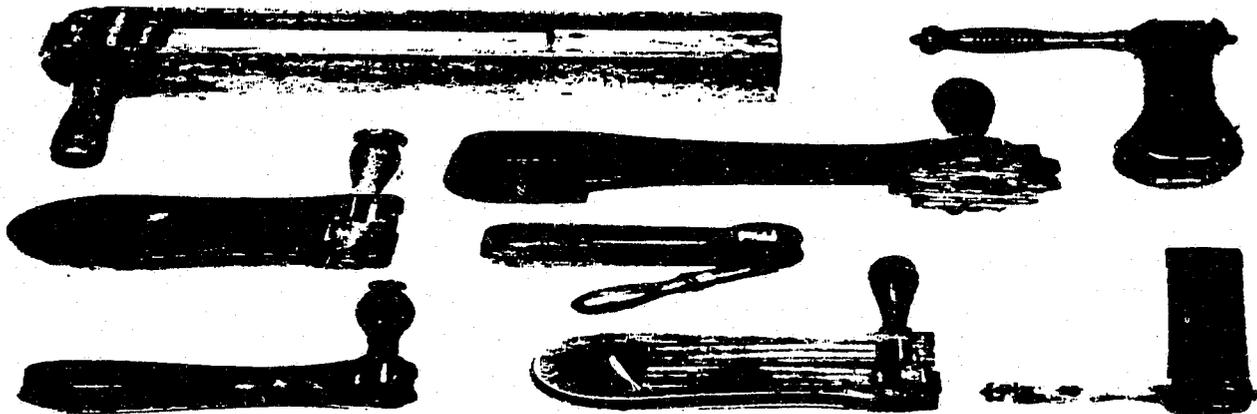
Members of the Rattlewatch, equipped with muskets and hand-rattles, receive their orders at muster before making their regular rounds at the turn of the 17th century

### Under British Rule (1664 - 1783)

In 1664, the British seized New Amsterdam and its outskirts and renamed the territory New York, in honor of the Duke of York. Although immediate steps were taken to make the region's 1,500 settlers conform to the English system, peacekeeping activities underwent few changes.

Instead of a *schout-fiscal*, there was an English constable. His job was to keep the peace, suppress excessive drinking, gambling, prostitution, and prevent disturbances when church services were in progress.

During the late 1600's, with the first of the French and Indian wars underway, the military assumed responsibility for maintaining law and order in the City. Officials appointed a bellman to do the job. His title came from the bell he rang while making his rounds and calling out the hours. In



**These are several variations of hand-rattles carried by members of the Rattlewatch. In an emergency situation rattles could be noisily spun to summon assistance from fellow Rattlewatch members.**

addition to the bell, he was issued a gun, uniform, badge, shoes and stockings, becoming the City's first uniformed policeman.

The start of the 18th century brought radical changes to the City's system of public protection. The post of bellman was abolished and the English introduced the constable's watch to protect New York's 6,000 residents. What is now lower to mid-Manhattan was divided into six sectors, with a High Constable and 12 sub-constables sworn to "take care, and keep and preserve the peace" throughout the area. In 1731, a watch-house - or jail - was built at the corner of Wall and Broad Streets. Punishment for "ruffians and evildoers" was carried out in the "cage, stocks, whipping post or ducking stool" in front of City Hall.

### **The Revolutionary War (1776 - 1783)**

The City was occupied by the British during most of the revolution - from September 1776 to November 1783. The redcoats seized control of the provincial and municipal governments and a military governor was made responsible for providing protection for the citizenry.

New Yorkers, however, were dissatisfied with the level of protection provided by the British army, and in January 1777, they decided to do something about it.

History repeated itself as they banded together to form a civilian watch. With the City larger in size and population, and its problems greater than in the days of Dutch rule, instead of a small Rattlewatch they had a force of 80 men patrolling the streets during the evening hours.

In May 1778, the British military commandant appointed three citizens to form a quasi-civil police department to administer and direct the night watch.

### **Period of Independence (1783 - 1830)**

By the time the Revolutionary War ended, the City's population had grown to 60,000 - and police protection had become a major problem. But little was done to deal with it. Crime continued to increase through the late 1820's. Although more watchmen were hired, they were widely regarded as incompetent and the protection they provided was considered inadequate.

For years the situation remained this way. Nothing was done until contempt for the City's weak police force finally gave way to fear - fear that the City's social disintegration was imminent. And with that fear came the realization that something had to be done about providing New York with a strong, effective police department.

### **New York's Finest Finally Finds Its Way**

During the mid-1800's, New York became home to thousands of destitute and desperate immigrants from Ireland and Germany. Many could barely afford housing in the rat-infested, unlit, unheated and horribly overcrowded tenements and wooden shanties on the City's outskirts.

Salaries at the time scarcely provided working people with enough to cover their living expenses. Men and women - and children as young as ten - earned less than 30 cents a day for laboring 12 to 15 hours in

unhealthy and hazardous factories.

City streets were unpaved, lacked proper drainage, and were cluttered with uncollected trash. When it rained, they quickly became quagmires of mud and filth.

Many people fell sick from contaminated water, and overcrowded living conditions caused disease to spread rapidly and uncontrollably.

Crime was rampant on the unlit streets, especially when moonless nights left large parts of the city in total darkness. It was common for thieves to roam the streets burglarizing buildings and attacking people as they hurried home.

Living conditions, such as these, caused anger and despair, making New York fertile ground for a tremendous growth in crime, vice and disorder.

Frightened and enraged by this criminal onslaught, New Yorkers looked at police departments far and near in hopes of finding a strong, effective model to copy. They decided on the Metropolitan Police of London.

### **The London Police Model (1830 - 1845)**

In 1828, Sir Robert Peel, British Home Secretary, introduced a bill establishing a paid professional police force - one that wore uniforms, was well drilled and devoted itself full-time to protecting the peace. Nicknamed "bobbies" and "peelers," this police force had been created because of a marked increase in criminal activity in England. With a similar upsurge in crime in their own city, New Yorkers decided to try a similar solution.

### **The Municipal Police (1845 - 1857)**

The City's old system of policing - the 80 member Nightwatch that patrolled the streets during the evening hours - was finally legislated out of existence in 1844 and replaced with a new system - the Day and Night Police.

The State Legislature approved the creation of the new force and authorized the hiring of up to 800 men. But the City Council, rather than adopting the concept, decided that it could get by with a municipal police force of only 200 men. This small force, of course, quickly proved inadequate. In 1845, the original act of the State Legislature was adopted and a uniformed Municipal Police Force of 800 men was established.

### **The First Shield (May 23, 1845)**

Many policemen strongly objected to wearing a specially designed uniform, preferring to dress in their own clothes. They viewed the uniform as a British innovation and an infringement on their rights as freeborn American citizens. Many citizens shared this contempt and publicly condemned a uniform force as nothing more than a "standing army" and "liveried lackeys."



A compromise was finally reached under which police officers wore an eight-point, star-shaped copper badge over the left breast of their coats in lieu of a complete uniform. The policemen became known as "star police" and later on as "coppers" and "cops."

### **The First Patrol Guide (July 16, 1845)**

The first set of printed rules and regulations was issued to the force in 1845. These "regulations for the Day and Night Police of the City of New York with Instructions as to the Legal Powers and Duties of Policemen" dealt with the statutory and administrative aspects of the job.

Policemen were instructed that "the prevention of crime being the most important object in your view, your exhortations must be constantly used to accomplish that end" and "the absence of crime will be considered the best proof of the efficiency of the police."

## The First Official Uniform (1853)

4

Full uniforms were finally adopted in 1853. The first full uniform consisted of a leather helmet and a blue, single-breasted cloth frock coat, buttoned to the neck with the letters M.P. (Municipal Police) on a standing collar. Gray trousers, with a half-inch black stripe running down the side of each leg, completed the outfit.

Each officer was equipped with a baton that was 22 inches long and three-quarters of an inch thick. The Department "Rules and Regulations" required that the club be used only "in urgent self defense." The Municipal Police were not authorized to carry side arms for patrol duty.

### Formal Training

Formal training came into existence in 1853. Police Captains instructed officers in the "school of soldier" and drill instructors were appointed to train and discipline officers in crowd and riot control.

### Communications

During the early 1850's, the New York Police constructed a simple telegraph network between their chief's office and the various precincts. The primary

purpose of this communications system was to speed the dispatch of extra officers to fire and riot scenes. However, most of the messages dealt with lost children and stray horses.

## The Metropolitan Police (1857 -1870)

Concerned about the City's mushrooming crime rate, officials decided that sweeping and radical changes had to be made in police protection. A state-controlled Metropolitan Police District was established to step in and slowly phase out the Municipal Police Department.

Members of the municipal force were reluctant to relinquish their jobs and continued to patrol the City's streets, often clashing with the metropolitan police over turf. While the courts attempted to resolve the problem, the two blue-coated forces competed with one another in arresting the ringleaders of the Bowery Boys and the Pug Uglies, gangs of hardened street toughs that terrorized the City.

Eventually an agreement was reached and many municipal officers joined the ranks of the Metropolitan Police.

Under the Metropolitan Police Act, the "Met's" were governed by three police commissioners and consisted of a general superintendent, two deputy superintendents, five surgeons, and assorted inspec-



CAPTAIN

CHIEF

LIEUTENANT

CAP-COVER FOR RAIN

RESERVE OFFICER

PRIVATE

The first complete uniform worn by the Municipal Police was adopted in 1853

tors, captains, sergeants and patrolmen. All were outfitted in similar uniforms - the chief difference being the frock coat. Those worn by superior officers were double-breasted; all others were single breasted.

In 1857, under Frederick Tallmadge, the first general superintendent, the Metropolitan Police District was divided into precincts, which in turn were subdivided into patrol beats. The precincts, some having more than one station house, were each staffed with one inspector, one captain, four sergeants, patrolmen and officers assigned to details.

Among the improvements introduced in the 1850's was the "Rogues Portrait Gallery" - a collection of photographs of hundreds of known criminals. Also established was a harbor police force of 25 men and a more sophisticated telegraphic link among precincts.

### **Civil War Draft Riots**

In 1863, the Mets were confronted with their first major crisis, the Civil War Draft Riots. With tempers flaring in response to President Lincoln's proclamation that 300,000 men would be inducted into the Union Army, rioters wreaked mayhem on the streets of New York. The violence and destruction went on for four days before the frenzied protest was quelled. Many lives were lost and injuries suffered, and several station houses were burned to the ground after officers abandoned them as they fled for their lives.

As the Civil War wound down, crimes of violence in the City increased. In 1864, a "police insurance fund" was established to guarantee financial security to the families of policemen killed or disabled in the line of duty.

In 1868, with the Mets' ranks largely comprised of aged veterans from the old Municipal Police Department, the commissioners successfully lobbied for half-pay retirement pensions for its loyal public servants.

### **The Municipal Police Department Is Restored**

In 1870, the State Legislature passed an act known as the "Tweed Charter" that returned police powers to the Municipal Police. The Mets merged with the restored Municipal Police which was governed by four commissioners appointed by the Mayor.

A "Flag of Honor" was presented to the Department in 1872 by the people of the City in recognition of the outstanding performance by the police during times of public disturbance, particularly the draft riots. The flag, reserved for display at annual parades and funerals of officers killed in the line of duty, was inscribed on one side with the Department motto "Faithful unto Death" and with the City Seal on the other.

In 1873, the Department was reorganized. The number of commissioners was upped to five and the force was now comprised of a superintendent, three inspectors, captains, sergeants, patrolmen, civilian clerks and doormen (civilians licensed by the police to act as security guards for residential buildings).

Hiring standards were tightened and police candidates were required to be United States citizens, residents of the State for at least a year, and free of any criminal convictions. In addition, a Board of Surgeons was established to examine candidates and supervise the medical and surgical services of the Department.

Also changed was the procedural manual, which was not only revised and updated, but introduced a new title for the police force, "Department of Police for the City of New York."

From 1872 to 1881, in a bid to improve sanitary conditions in the City, the Department was put in charge of hiring, overseeing and providing equipment to a street cleaning task force.

In 1874, Mayor William Havemeyer tagged the Department with its popular nickname - "The Finest."

The improvements kept coming. Telephone links between all police facilities replaced the sporadically placed, outdated telegraph system in 1880. A year later, a central office for the Bureau of Detectives was established at Police Headquarters, located at 300 Mulberry Street.

In 1888, the Department hired its first women employees. Four women joined the force and were assigned as precinct matrons. It wasn't until a year later, however, that they were officially considered uniformed members of the service.

By 1894, with the restructuring of the Police Department in full swing, the State Senate appointed a committee to investigate alleged abuses of authority by the police. The office of superintendent was abolished and replaced with a chief of police who had the power to assign and transfer and to suspend policemen for up to 10 days prior to trial by the police commissioners.

### **Teddy Roosevelt, The Innovator**

In 1895, Theodore Roosevelt was appointed to the newly installed board of police commissioners. He immediately set about strengthening qualifications for appointment to ensure that physical and mental ability would be given more weight than political influence.

Advocating progressive recruitment, he hired the first female secretary and campaigned to have Jewish officers join the ranks of the primarily Irish Catholic police force.

Roosevelt helped pave the way for the modernization of the Department. During his tenure

as a commissioner, telephone call boxes were installed on City sidewalks, permitting officers to communicate with their station houses. Station Houses were renovated and more matrons were assigned to them. A patrol wagon service was introduced to help patrolmen get to their posts and to emergencies more quickly.

To relieve overcrowding and improve hygiene, sleeping quarters for transients were abolished at station houses and replaced with separate lodging houses. The .32 caliber revolver became the standard on-duty side arm and a bicycle squad was established and quickly expanded to 100 officers.

Department moral greatly increased as a result of Roosevelt's innovations. It was boosted even further when he instituted a recognition system for meritorious police service before he resigned in 1897 to become Secretary of the Navy.

### **Modern Day Police Department**

In 1898, the State Legislature ordered that 24 local governments - cities, towns and villages - consolidate into a single entity: New York City. As a result, the Police Department of the Greater City of New York assimilated 18 smaller police agencies from various parts of Queens, Kings, Richmond, Bronx and New York Counties. The greatly-expanded force was named the "New York Police Department."

A year later plain clothes officers were used for the first time. They travelled in cars, protecting street-cars from attack by strikers.

The City's governmental expansion made the problems of policing more complex in the early years of the 20th century.

In 1901, to curb confusion and dissent within the Department's administration, the State Legislature adopted a bill giving a single commissioner of police full responsibility for overseeing the agency. Colonel Michael Murphy was the first to hold the position, and he appointed William Devery as "First Deputy Police Commissioner."

Working seven days a week, the policemen of the early 1900's got to know residents, merchants, and ruffians on their eight block foot posts. The round-the-clock chart included tours of 7 A.M. to 3 P.M.; 3 P.M. to 11 P.M. and 11 P.M. to 7 A.M. Officers rarely got a day off - and when they did, it was usually after 45 to 50 days of work.

### **Turn of the Century (1900 - 1920)**

The City and its Police Department now faced an era of modernization and growth spurred on by community needs and the "needs of the time."

Many exciting innovations were ushered in

with the first decade. The first automobiles could be seen pattering about, bridges and tunnels connected the City to neighboring areas, railway construction began, mechanical traffic control devices were installed, a more scientific technique replaced the antiquated criminal identification system and the Department continued to organize specialized units.

In autumn of 1904, the Mounted Division, recognized for its mobility and range of vision, was used to calm labor unrest, control crowds and regulate traffic. A year later, the Motorcycle Bureau was formed to help handle traffic duties.

By 1909, folks were regularly moseying into and about the City in "horseless carriages" via the newly opened Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Queensboro and Manhattan bridges. Police Headquarters had been relocated to 240 Centre Street and a Bureau of Criminal Identification was established to maintain criminal records.

An effective new method of fingerprint identification was used for the first time by the "Safe and Loft Squad" in 1911 to positively identify a burglar through fingerprints left behind on a window sill. Later renamed the "Safe, Loft and Truck Squad," this unit protected businessmen from skilled thieves who made a habit of going after and making off with valuables stored in safes, lofts and trucks.

As the City's population grew, so did its crime problem. In 1914, recognizing that "the youth of today could turn into the criminal of tomorrow," Captain John Sweeny founded the Police Athletic League on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Initially called the Junior Police Corps, its mission was to keep youngsters out of trouble by channeling their energies into recreational and athletic activities.

### **Entering Difficult Times - The 1920's**

In 1917, America entered World War I. That same year, the Department put its first radio-equipped patrol car on the road and established a Missing Persons Bureau.

The war ended in November 1918, and was quickly followed by the "Roaring 20's." Police faced huge problems trying to enforce the constitutional ban on alcohol. Gangster-controlled speakeasies reaped huge profits through the illegal sale of liquor. "Prohibition" and economic hard times caused criminal behavior to flourish.

In 1924, a course of comprehensive training for all members of the Department was introduced at the "Police College" on Broome Street in Manhattan. New officers spent an arduous three months studying police doctrine. Know-how and in-service courses were given on all levels to keep Department members abreast of the latest developments in police work.

In 1929, the Aviation Unit was born and

more radio-equipped patrol cars were put on the road.

In October 1929, the stock market crashed, panic on Wall Street spread and soon engulfed most of the world. The "Great Depression" devastated the economy, creating widespread poverty and desperation.

Police officers proved their commitment to public service by securing food, fuel, clothing and jobs for the needy and by generously donating to a relief fund.

The District Attorney's Office Squad was set up as an undercover unit operating out of the Manhattan Criminal Courts Building. Its job was to fight organized crime and racketeers who were attempting to capitalize on the City's plight.

### **Coping With Traffic And Teenagers - The 1930's**

By 1930, Manhattan's neatly organized streets and avenues had become the setting for a growing number of traffic accidents and deaths. Juvenile delinquency had also become a problem. The Department met both of these challenges with long term solutions.

In response to the traffic problem, it implemented a three-pronged program of regulation, enforcement and safety education.

The juvenile delinquency problem was met through the development of a unit called the Crime Prevention Bureau. Consistent with P.A.L.'s philosophy, the bureau offered counseling, as well as educational and recreational activities to the City's youth in hopes that they would keep them from turning to crime.

In 1939, the Department played an exciting role policing a big event - the New York World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens.

### **Shell Shocked and "Blue" The 40's and 50's**

In 1941, America entered World War II. Months before the costly lesson of Pearl Harbor, a civil defense strategy had been formulated to ensure the safety of New York City's citizens in the event of an enemy attack.

Working with other Federal, State and City agencies, the N.Y.P.D. was entrusted with reuniting separated families and providing relief.

In addition to their police duties, officers also enforced the nation's rationing of such staples as canned food, fuel, rubber products and women's nylons.

In 1945, the war ended. With the City's population continuing to grow by leaps and bounds, the

Department concentrated on expansion. By 1957, its strength had reached 23,590.

### **The 1960's - A Time Of Civil Unrest**

With the 1960's, came great advances in income, education and housing, but not in civil rights. The mood of contentment that had characterized the 1950's was shattered not only by the skyrocketing crime-wave, but by civil disorder, alarming rises in welfare cases, drug abuse and youth unemployment.

Youth crime again became rampant. The City was entering a time of "urban crisis." Community cohesion began to disintegrate and inner-city crime rates rose alarmingly.

The police officer's capacity to understand the law, deal with explosive situations and to cope with social and economic problems was continually tested during this decade.

In 1964, Harlem erupted in civil disorder, leaving many seriously injured, one dead and hundreds arrested. In 1968, city-wide disorder followed the assassination of Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **Striving To Meet The Needs Of The Time - The 1970's**

After the violence of the 1960's, there was a need to rebuild police-community relations. The Department recognized that increased foot patrols would best accomplish this goal. A foot officer could be a source of information, a counselor to the public and the eyes and ears of the Department.

In 1972, an equal opportunity policy was implemented. It directed that women be hired and assigned to perform the same duties as male officers. Women were given equal promotional opportunities and the right to undertake the same law enforcement role as men.

### **The 1980's**

As the 20th century moved along, so did the wheels of progress turn for the Department. Rapid response to criminal and emergency incidents became the Department's standard measure of performance. More officers were assigned to radio-car patrol and the Department's ability to interact with the City's citizens began to decline.

Realizing that a balance had to be struck between rapid response and police-community relations, the Department instituted the Community Police Officer Program. Community Police Officers would be assigned to specific beats, becoming acquainted with the residents, merchants and criminals in their beat area. They were charged with more than just patrolling

8  
their beats. They were to become community advocates and problem solvers, organizing the community to resist crime. They would do more than just respond to incidents, they would look for and correct the underlying cause of the condition.

In the early 1990's, under Police Commissioner Lee P. Brown, Community Policing was adopted as the Department's dominant style of policing. This radical change involves all segments of the Department in Community Policing. Emphasis is no longer on rapid response, although the capability for this response remains, but on problem solving and police-community relations.

In 1993, under Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, Community Policing remains the Department's dominant style of policing. Police Commissioner Kelly has refined and continues to expand Community Policing.

Today, the Department stands as an example to the world of what modern policing is all about.

