



History Of The Prescott Police Department

By The Prescott Museum & Visitor Centre

Prescott's Life as A Police Village:

The Prescott police force dates to 1834. When Prescott was named a police village, a town-appointed Board of Police controlled the town. This board was to function as a municipal council and hear cases of those accused of a crime in Prescott. This board came into effect on March 6th, 1834. The first iteration of the police board consisted of two representatives of the west ward (west of Centre Street), two elected representatives of the east ward (east of Centre Street), who in turn appointed a fifth member. The board then elected a president. The 1834 board consisted of Alexander McMillan, President; Thomas Fraser, Timothy Buckley, Moses Murphy and John Holden, Robert Headlam was named clerk for the board. Others included Alexander McMillian Jr., collector; Patrick Welch, pound keeper; and Asabel Gerald's, second constable. Michael Hartnett, James Newman, and John Headlam were named officers of the company.

The first town bylaws were passed in May of 1834. That month saw twenty-three bylaws passed concerning the use of wagons, pasture guidelines, the firing of guns, public intoxication, and Sabbath Day regulations, among others. The first mentioned payment for the officers' dates to May 1834 as well. The townhall minutes stated that police board members were paid one shilling and three pence for "serving summons or subpoena," two shillings and six pence for every arrest, and seven pence for every hog impounded. Their office building and jailhouse were rented from prominent Prescott resident George Walsh for nine pounds a year.

The board's first case dates to June 12th, 1834, when a man named Captain McMillian was charged with public indecency, after being caught swimming in the nude in the St. Lawrence River by 2nd Constable Asabel Gerald's. After his arrest, Captain McMillian pleaded guilty and was reported to tell the board "To do their worst." The board fined McMillian 10 pence and jail time if the fine was not paid. He escaped from custody the following day.

Through the 1840s the citizens of Prescott became displeased with the operation of the police board. By the 1850s the provincial government passed the Baldwin Act, creating a municipal government elected by the town's citizens. In 1849 the newly formed town council signed a contract with a newly formed board of police that lasted from 1849 to 1957. Throughout the board's history, the constables held important roles in the town besides their duties as police officers such as fire and health inspections.

The Second Iteration of The Police Force:

After the incorporation of a new local force in 1849, it saw major upgrades in the following decade. By 1851 a new facility began construction on Henry Street, which included a jailhouse, courtroom, and council chambers which were completed the following year.

By 1859 the Public Improvements Committee recommended changes to the facility (specifically to the jailcells) after a lack of upkeep and repair work to that section of the building. Temporary fixes occurred until the jailhouse could be moved into the newly built Town Hall on King Street in 1875. After the move of the Police Office in 1875, the offices were located on the bottom floor of the building, while the jail itself was in the basement.



Jail Cells at Old Town Hall

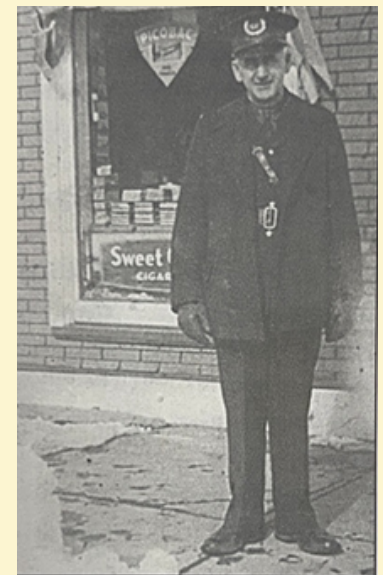
Through the early years of the Prescott forces' involvement with the town, the force shrunk drastically, expanding the responsibilities held by the constables who served in Prescott. Jehail Tinkess, the chief constable from 1868-1884, was credited as the town health inspector, pound keeper, and fire supervisor, and oversaw providing meals to the prisoners.

With the increase in responsibilities with the town's police, so came the increase in payment. Through the 1850s constables were paid twenty pounds a year, with a small bonus for each arrest. The 1860s saw an increase to \$30 per quarter. The next pay increase came in 1903, when the officer's salary was raised to \$50 per month, and by the end of this era of the police force the town was paying \$3,600 a year for each officer. The first official uniforms were purchased for the force in 1881 from Edward Mundle, a merchant-tailor of Prescott, for \$25. This business served as the exclusive tailor for the force from 1881 until 1888, when they switched to A. Davis Bros of Prescott, who supplied uniforms through the 1890s. Due to funding issues within the town towards the police force, Prescott was very delayed compared to other municipalities when it came to the purchase of equipment for the officers.



John W. Hall, Prescott Police, 1930-42. Photo taken in 1916 in military police uniform.

In 1865 the first handcuffs were purchased at \$1.50 a pair, and in 1869 badges were purchased for \$1.07 a badge. The town's police force did not receive firearms until 1921, and the first police car was not put into service until 1958. By the 1940s, the town's municipal council was concerned about the operation of the Prescott Police Force, and in turn, signed a deal with the Ontario Provincial Police for policing the community. This contract ran from 1949 - 1957. After the conclusion of the OPP partnership the town entered an agreement with the local municipalities to create a rotating police force.



George W. Fox, Prescott Police,

The Prescott Force 1957 -1999:

The Prescott Police Department was established on December 1st, 1957, under the administration of Brockville judge Donald F. Lewis, chair; magistrate Gordon Jermyn of Gananoque, and then mayor of Prescott Harry Ranson. The first chief constable was Eric Smith of Bowmanville, who came to Prescott and assisted in the selection of the other officers. These officers were Corporal Tom Conaway, Constable Matthew Hayes, William Hayes, Keith Cameron, and Keith Whitehorne.



1957 Police force, front row, left to right, Tom Conaway, Eric Smith, Matthew Hayes. Second row, left to right, Keith Whitehorne, Keith Cameron, William Hayes.

The 1960s saw the incorporation of a 40-hour work week, warranting the addition of an additional two officers, although the force was shortened by one two-years later due to budgetary issues. For a period, the town hired additional crew after a rise in petty crime during the 1970s with a total of 4,802 crimes reported in Prescott in 1977. After a change in leadership and inclusion of a larger police presence in the town the crime rate in Prescott dropped.

With the creation of the Prescott Police Department, the Police Services Board has guided the force. By statute, the board is comprised of the head of council, one councillor, two provincial appointees, and one member appointed by council. This board was responsible for the provisions and overseeing of adequate and effective management of the police force within Prescott, as well as appointing chiefs to the department.

After the demolition of the old Town hall the Police Department operated out of the municipal building on Dibble Street from 1960-1962. After the construction of the old firehall the police force shared a space with the fire department from 1962 until 1999.

The Return of the OPP:

In 1999 a partnership was formed with the surrounding municipalities to operate under a joint-effort department with the OPP. After the OPP took over the department, changes were made with the force such as the refitting of police cruisers to match the OPP's fleet, and the development of their own office in Prescott. Through the early years of the OPP force, they operated out of a small satellite office on Prescott Centre Drive (now home to Ultramar Gas Station and truck stop). A more permanent office was constructed in 2007 and has served as the main satellite for the Prescott area since. Currently Prescott is policed by a rotating group of officers who serve the Leeds and Grenville area.

The Prescott Museum & Visitor Centre

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202 King Street West, Prescott, ON

