

When many early Europeans first arrived to our shores, they were surprised at the lack of organized law enforcement. It was more or less, "the stronger were policing themselves and their communities".

After "things" got fairly well settled the job of maintaining order in the new colonies was given to Justices of the Peace, and one might see "culprits" in pillories or stocks, paying their debt to society. But, as colonies changed into towns and towns into cities, the Justice of the Peace system was not enough. It became time for an organized, and salaried policemen (there were no policewomen at the time).

In the early 1600's, Boston launched Night Watch, which worked reasonably well as long as the area remained a rural and agrarian one. New York City established the Shout and Rattle Watch in 1651, but, by 1705 Philadelphia found it necessary to divide the city into ten patrol areas. This was really the first stab in America at "organized law enforcement".

Sometime between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the more than rapid growth of population and industrialization of America mandated the development of municipal police departments. In 1833, Philadelphia organized an independent, 24/7 police squad. . In 1844, NYC maintained two police forces; one unit working day, and one graveyard shift. During this period, police departments were headed by police chiefs, appointed and accountable to political bosses eerily similar to what was seen in the black and white police movies of the 1940's and 1950's. Corruption ran rampant.

Some of the law enforcement structure we inherited from England was "The Sheriff System". As America moved west, in most frontier towns the sheriff was the chief law enforcement official. He could be recruited from the local community, or more often a Sheriff was selected by his reputation, and the more dismal the rep, the more likely he was to be elected. The Sheriff System exists in America today, but, on a more formal and politicized basis.

21st Century law enforcement agencies and departments are highly specialized organizations, with ongoing training to prepare to meet a great variety of problems and situations. We have federal, state, county, and municipal police. We no longer live in our parent's world. There are dangers we face daily they couldn't have imagined. We remain dependent on peace officers from every organization for our" life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and to enforce the vision of our founding fathers when they penned that brilliant document, the U.S. Constitution.