LAW AND ORDER IN THE CAPITAL CITY
A History of the Washington Police
1800-1886

by
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In Memoriam
Letitia Woods Brown
1915-1976
LAW AND ORDER IN THE CAPITAL CITY
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Preface

Modern society demands a competent police force. Modern cities have found few demands more difficult to meet. This makes it surprising that the history of law enforcement in America has been relatively unexplored. There is neither a scholarly nor a popular history of law enforcement in the United States as a whole. Two fine studies of particular urban police forces have been published in the last decade: Roger Lane's *Policing the City: Boston, 1822-1885* (1967) and James F. Richardson's *The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (1970). Several reexaminations of the police function in general and the role of a police force in a democratic society in particular were published in the late 1960's; they can be found in the bibliography.

In this as in so many respects, Washington's story is unique. The problems faced in the policing of any large city were compounded by the peculiarities of policing the nation's capital. Two "histories" of the Washington police have been published. Richard Sylvester's *District of Columbia Police—A Retrospect of the Police Organization of the Cities of Washington and Georgetown and the District of Columbia, With Biographical Sketches, Illustrations, and Historic Cases* (1894) is basically a compilation of names, dates, incidents, and photographs. Sylvester was a member of the Metropolitan Police Department and made certain to include nothing critical of the force. He made no attempt to examine or interpret the role of the police in local society. *The Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C.: Official Illustrated History* (1908), written by John Russell Young and E.C.R. Humphries, is in the same category as Sylvester's work.

The present study was done with two objectives. It attempts to provide the first unbiased and thorough account of the Washington police force from its founding through its several reorganizations prior to 1886. This critical historical review of a particular force, it is hoped, will also contribute to our general understanding of police work in an urban, democratic society.

As in New York and Boston, police history in Washington reveals what strikes one as an extraordinarily high rate of failure in the attempt to provide adequate protection in a nineteenth-century city. Members of the force, as indicated by contemporary police files, were too often corrupt and incompetent. Politically partisan uses of the police—a threat to liberty in any society—was evident in the nation's capital more than one would like to believe. On the other hand, Washington's police, like forces in other cities, did much to benefit society in preserving law and order as well as assisting in a variety of charitable functions.

The uniqueness of the story of the Washington police stems mainly from the fact that they were the law enforcement officers of the nation's capital. They frequently encountered problem situations of national significance, whether it was a Congressman violating vice laws or demonstrators come to petition their government. Although not faced with the flood of immigrants that created special policing problems in New York and Boston, Washington police were challenged by the social tensions that arose from the racial composition of the capital city. The desire of certain politicians to make Washington a city which would give visitors a favorable impression of the United States also put special pressures on the police. Nevertheless, those same politicians were seldom eager to spend the money necessary to provide Washington with a "model" police force.

Historian Richard C. Wade has observed that modern readers will find some consolation in comparing today's police forces with those utterly inadequate forces of the last century. Yet, he also notes, the roots of modern police professionalism are to be found in that unimpressive record. Washington's police history, as described in the following chapters, illustrates the validity of Wade's balanced observations.
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CHAPTER ONE

The Origins of the Urban Police Force

AMERICANS traditionally have been ambivalent toward their police forces. We harbor a suspicion of incompatibility between republican institutions and a police force which resembles a standing army. Colonial history offered many examples of the dangers posed to popular liberty by paid government officers. Even in the latter half of the twentieth century, we commonly refer to a “police state” as the antithesis of a “democracy.”

In view of this apparent contradiction between a free society and a police force which has the potential to curtail that freedom, it might have been expected that police forces in the United States would be more severely limited in their exercise of power. However, most city dwellers have agreed with Sir Robert Peel’s reflections on the meaning of freedom: a people’s “liberty does not consist of having their houses robbed by organized gangs of thieves.” As a consequence, “urban society has always vested a wide, indeed awesome, responsibility on its police.” The police are appointed in the first place to maintain order, prevent crime, protect life and property. Historically, however, their duties have been extended to include fighting fires, suppressing vice, assisting in health services, supervising elections, directing traffic, inspecting buildings, and locating truants and runaways. Policemen must often walk a fine line between the protection and the suppression of personal liberties in the performance of this comprehensive set of duties in a democratic society.

Because of our philosophical apprehension of a police state, there developed in the United States a distinctive type of police force: quasi-military in purpose and functions, yet subject to civilian control. The police and military have a great deal in common. Members of both establishments wear uniforms, carry arms, and perform repressive tasks. By placing civilians in ultimate supervisory roles over both the police and the military, it is believed that the fear of overly repressive forces can be eliminated. This can be accomplished, however, only if the civilians in control do not themselves use the police or military to achieve partisan political ends. Police history in the United States, including the police history of the nation’s capital, unfortunately indicates that too often civilian control has been abused for such political motives.

As one whose duty it is to enforce the law and maintain order, the policeman often strains his relations with the community. Enforcement of some laws, whether they be traffic regulations or the ever-difficult vice laws, invariably offends sizable portions of the community. Throughout their history, the police “have been the object of attack by press and pulpit, bench and bar, civic and commercial associations, labor leaders, professional politicians, ambitious office seekers, reformers and criminals.”

In this context it would be ideal if it could be reported that with few exceptions policemen have been well suited for their important and difficult jobs. Too often in the past, however, policing the cities has “attracted chiefly the shiftless, the incompetent and the ignorant.” Ironically, the very people who were suspicious of military power usually employed a police force whose members’ military background was often their only “qualification” for police duty.

* * * *

Nineteenth-century civic leaders were not the first to struggle with the dilemmas inherent in urban police policy and practice. Both the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt and
Roman emperors simply used soldiers to perform police duties. Greek civilization not only provided the term *polis*, the citadel or governmental center of the city-state, from which the word "police" is ultimately derived, but ancient Athens also supplied the historical precedent for the use of citizens in police work.⁰⁰

Although France and other continental countries maintained professional police forces of a sort as early as the seventeenth century, it is in England that historians find the origins of U.S. police forces.¹¹ As early as the reign of Alfred the Great (870-901) local citizens associations began pledging to maintain law and order in various areas in England. Eventually governmental jurisdictions were distinguished by the terms "hundreds" and "shires." Ten family groups composed a "tithing," and ten titheings constituted a hundred. A constable appointed by a local nobleman was placed in charge of the weapons and equipment of each hundred.

Hundreds were grouped into shires, and the "shire-reeve" or sheriff came into being. The Crown appointed sheriffs to supervise the shire or county. They ensured that laws were enforced effectively and took part in the pursuit and apprehension of lawbreakers. Sadly, the sheriffs also set a precedent for later policemen when they became interested in lining their own pockets. Scandals often surrounded them, and too often "forgery and trickery marked their administration of office."¹²

Thirteenth-century English society was hardly made safe by the constables and sheriffs. "Men were never secure in their houses and whole villages were often plundered by bands of robbers."¹³ Doubtless in response to this situation, the first official police forces were created in the large towns of England during the reign of Edward I (1272-1307). At the same time the constable became the primary law enforcement officer in all towns throughout England.

In the fourteenth century, Edward II created the office of justice of the peace. The latter was originally intended to assist the sheriff in policing the county, but in time took on local judicial functions as well. The constable became the assistant to the justice, being responsible for supervising the night watchmen, inquiring into offenses, serving summonses, executing warrants, and taking charge of prisoners. Gradually the old citizen pledge system declined. Citizens paid others to do their police work for them, and constables paid deputies to do their work.

With increasing urbanization in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, policing the city became more complex. Night watchmen and fragmented civic associations like the "Box Street Horse And Foot Patrol" were unable to curb crime. Even the establishment of nine police offices within the metropolitan area of London at the beginning of the nineteenth century had minimal effect.¹⁴

While crime itself did much to convince Englishmen that regular paid policemen were needed, writers tried to prepare the people philosophically. Henry Fielding, who wrote an *Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers*, advocated the idea of preventing crime by police action instead of seeking to control it after the fact. Patrick Colquhoun, a Scot magistrate, suggested in his *Treatise on the Police* (1796) that the best means for prevention of crimes was to create police forces in towns.¹⁵ By the late 1820's, English citizens, and especially Londoners, were ready for the creation of a police force.

Sir Robert Peel, Home Secretary, argued that Britain must revert to the Anglo-Saxon principle that each community is responsible for preserving its own law and order. For London, therefore, there should be a body of civilians appointed and paid by the community to serve as police officers. Peel introduced in Parliament on April 15, 1829, a "Bill for Improving the Police in and near the Metropolis." Parliament, which had turned down previous bills with a similar intent, quickly approved this one.¹⁶

Following Peel's recommendations regarding a *professional* police force, a commission headed by Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne organized the London Metropolitan Police. The London Police became the model for urban forces in the United States. For example, Peel and his fellow reformers made it clear that public cooperation was essential in police work, and that physical force should be kept to a minimum. The police were "to recognize always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them."¹⁷
On September 29, 1829, the London Metropolitan Police, some one thousand strong, took to their beats. Two commissioners, who had administrative but not judicial duties, commanded the officers; Parliament held the Home Secretary accountable for the conduct of the police department.

Dressed in top hats, three-quarter length royal blue coats, and white trousers, the police were a distinctive group on London streets. There was opposition to the uniformed guard, as the new police could be viewed as simply a new version of a standing army. Yet the policemen were armed only with batons or clubs and were clearly not soldiers bearing firearms. Public acceptance was soon achieved when the police gave no evidence of threatening proper individual liberties.

* * * * *

When colonists began settling in America they brought with them the law enforcement structures with which they were familiar in Europe. In Dutch-controlled New Amsterdam, the most important law enforcement official was the schout, whose counterpart in the English colonies was the constable. Both were charged with keeping the peace, suppressing excessive drinking, gambling and prostitution, and preventing disturbances when church services were in progress. As early as 1629, the Dutch West India Company had appointed a schout. Five years later one Joshua Pratt was chosen “to the office of Constable for Plymouth and sworn to faithfulness [sic] in the same.”

Urban historian Carl Bridenbaugh has noted that the job of constable in America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries “was a thankless one and the duties so onerous and distasteful that men persistently endeavored to avoid the office.” Constables were often tradesmen or artisans by profession, and their businesses suffered because of time spent on constabulary duties. Worse still, their authority was often flaunted. A Philadelphia constable, Solomon Cresson, was trying to disperse “a Lewd Tavern-keeper” and her company one evening in 1707, when “Governor John Evans arose from his table, beat the poor officer, and ‘sent him to Prison; where he was kept till the Afternoon of the Day following.’”

Throughout the first two centuries of settlement, constables remained the primary police officers in American cities during the day. At night they were usually assisted by a watch. In 1631 the Court of Assistants in Boston appointed a peace officer and six assistants to station themselves on a hill overlooking the town each night at sunset. “Fear of Indian outrages under cover of darkness led to the establishment of a ‘rattle watch’ in New Amsterdam in 1658.” Other cities, including Charleston,Philadelphia, and Newport, had established watches by 1690.

Each town having a watch required citizens to serve on it, but only New York paid the watchmen. The watch could be composed of householders appointed by the Mayor or City Council. At times the constable would round up a watch from among the citizens before he went off his daytime duty. Their duties included the discovery and putting out of fires, calling out the state of the weather, and lighting street lamps.

The constabulary-watch system remained characteristic well into the nineteenth century, not because it provided the best possible means of law enforcement in the growing and increasingly heterogeneous cities, but because no one had a better idea for preserving the laws.

Apart from the distasteful use of the military for constabulary duty, no colonial official broached a feasible plan for keeping the peace, nor, it may be noted, did anyone in London, Paris, or Rome, either. There is no doubt of the conspicuous failure of the eighteenth-century municipalities to solve the police problem.

It is not surprising, therefore, that once Robert Peel succeeded in establishing a modern police force in London, cities in the United States soon followed his example.

Notes

2 Oscar Handlin in Roger L. Lane, Policing the City: Boston, 1822-1825 (Cambridge: Harvard Univer-


4Berkley, *Democratic Policeman*, p. 35.


4Smith, pp. 1-2; Also, Eldefonzo, Coffey, and Grace, *Principles*, pp. 6-8.

4Smith, p. 121.

4Berkley, *Democratic Policeman*, p. 175; Also, pp. 169-175; Reith, *Blind Eye*, p. 9.


4*Task Force Report*, p. 4; Reith, *Blind Eye*, p. 31; Silver, "Demand For Order," p. 3.


4Reith, *Blind Eye*, p. 166; Berkley, *Democratic Policeman*, p. 89; Reith, *Democratic Ideal*, p. 10; Eldefonzo, Coffey, and Grace, *Law Enforcement*, pp. 43-45. Police Headquarters were at the rear of Four Whitehall Place, which was entered by way of a yard once owned by Scot Kings, hence, "Scotland Yard." After Peel's nickname, the English Police were called "Bobbies."


CHAPTER TWO

Crime and Police in Early Washington
1800-1835

It was not until Congress had resolved the partisan and sectional haggling over Alexander Hamilton’s plan to assume the states’ debts that agreement could be reached to locate the nation’s capital “on the river Potomac.” Two older towns, Georgetown, Maryland, and Alexandria, Virginia, lay within the boundaries of the ten-mile square designated the District of Columbia. Each had approximately five thousand inhabitants at the close of the eighteenth century. The new federal district, known as the City of Washington, encompassed a population of 3,210—2,464 whites and 746 blacks.¹

With the arrival of 131 federal employees in June 1800, Washington took on the function if not the appearance of the seat of national government. During the late fall of that year, Congress convened for the first time in its new location. Some eighteen months later, May 3, 1802, Congress passed an act incorporating the City of Washington. This charter provided for the establishment of a city government consisting of an elected twelve-member council of two chambers and a mayor appointed by the President. Among the powers of the Corporation was the authority “to establish night watches, or patroles.”²

The City Council, on September 20, 1803, created the position of “Superintendent (sic) of Police.”³ He replaced the constable who had been appointed by the Prince George’s County (Maryland) Court to serve as police officer for the city in embryo. The duties of the new Superintendent included notifying people to remove “all filth or other offensive substances, or nuisances or obstructions,” licensing slaughterhouses and kilns, visiting every part of the city at least once a month, and informing the magistrate of any violation of the laws. Pay for the Superintendent was $200 per annum, in addition to money he might pick up as an informer in cases involving fines.

Although previous histories list Cornelius Cunningham as Washington’s first Superintendent of Police, the National Intelligencer reported that Mayor Robert Brent appointed John Willis to that position.⁴ Willis confronted little serious crime in his short tenure, but there were early reports that the city “was overrun with petty thieves.”

The Council disavowed responsibility for Willis’ lax law enforcement. An apologist observed that the Council had required a monthly report from the Superintendent, but had no control over the appointment of that officer.⁵ In any event, the National Intelligencer noted that on July 9, 1804, “The Mayor had appointed Cornelius Coningham (sic) Superintendent of Police in the room of John Willis, resigned.” Thus Willis, the first police officer in Washington, became the first of a long list of policemen, including top administrators, to leave their positions under a cloud of suspicion.

Cornelius Cunningham served less than a year as Superintendent. In view of the reorganization begun at this time, it is likely that Cunningham was simply doing his civic duty until the City Council devised new methods of policing the capital. As a first step, the Council empowered the Mayor to appoint up to four constables to assist in enforcing the laws of the Corporation.⁶ Then, for reasons that were not clear, the Council changed the name of the Superintendent of Police to “the high Constable of the city,” and authorized a salary of $150 per year.⁷ This cut in pay for the top administrative officer was followed by a warning to all constables that they could be fined for negligence. Monthly reports were required from the policemen. The city constables would report to the High Constable, who, in turn, would report to the Council.

Richard Spaulding was appointed High Constable for Washington City early in
May 1805. Four city constables, James B. Heard, Jacob Crawford, Clement Venable, and Zephania Wade were named to assist him.

The City Council was still not satisfied with the police system, and continued to experiment with administrative changes. In 1807 the Council assigned the duties of the High Constable to four City Commissioners, one for each ward. The Commissioners were also to determine the compensation that each of the remaining four city constables would receive “over and above his legal fees and emoluments . . . for their vigilance and good conduct.”

Between 1808 and 1811, in still another attempt to find an effective and efficient police system, the city government tried “two officers of police.” Each was to be responsible for one district in the city, divided by Fourth Street West. Each was to be paid $100 semi-annually, provided the Mayor and one branch of the City Council certified that he had “fully and satisfactorily discharged his duty.” There is no evidence that the Council refused to pay the policemen under this carrot-and-stick approach, but after three years the positions of the two police officers were abolished. Thus, by 1811, the police duties were back in the hands of the city constables.

* * * * *

By 1808 the police laws for Washington had begun to deal specifically with blacks. Washington’s population was 23% black in 1800, 28% black in 1810. About one-seventh of the blacks were free in 1800 while over one-third of the black population was free in 1810. These blacks did much of the common labor in the capital, and their daily activities were closely watched by the police.

Since both Georgetown and Alexandria had restrictive legislation regarding blacks, it was not surprising that Washington followed suit. As early as 1796 Georgetown required its police to examine all blacks to determine their freedom, or if slaves, their legal right to live in the town, and later instructed them to check “all disorderly or improper collecting of the same.” Alexandria had similar laws in effect by 1811.

Washington’s City Council also charged its police officers or constables with enforcing that city’s black codes. The 1808 city ordinance stipulated that “no black person or person of colour, or loose, idle, disorderly person shall be allowed to walk about or assemble at tipspling or other houses, after ten o’clock at night.” Blacks violating that provision, or apprehended “dancing, tipspling, quarrelling (sic), or in playing at any game of hazard or ball, or in making noise, or disturbance,” would be fined five dollars for each offense. If slaves were convicted under this law, their owners were liable. The owner would get all but fifty cents of the fine remitted if he or she gave instructions to have the offending slave whipped. The fifty cents would go to the person who inflicted the punishment. Although the law did not say that the police officer would do the whipping, that inference would not be unreasonable in light of later practices.

By 1812 the growing number of free blacks in Washington apparently prompted whites to pressure the city government for further restrictions. On December 16 of that year, the City Council ordered the constables to enforce a stringent new ordinance. Free blacks had to register, giving evidence of a title of freedom. They were forbidden to engage in “disorderly” assemblies, were required to get a permit before an assembly of any kind, and could not even be present at gambling events. Half of the fines incurred were to be parcelled out to the person apprehending. The fines were $6 for not registering, $20 for disorderly assembly, and $10 for presence at places of gambling. Financially hard-pressed policemen could pad their incomes by prosecuting free blacks.

There are indications in the same 1812 act that Washington was attracting a sizable “criminal” element. The City Council urged the constables to be vigilant and again threatened them with fines if they were not. The constables must have increased their watchfulness, for the Council found need four months later to authorize the building of a watch house in each ward “for the purpose of confining, during the night time,” all such persons picked up under the terms of the 1812 act.

* * * * *

Protecting Washington from its local criminals became a matter of secondary importance when the War of 1812 broke out. By August 1814 a crisis was at hand. The
militia had gone out to meet the British. There were fears of slave uprisings, and that the city, "striped of troops lay exposed not only to rebellious blacks but to lawless whites ready to loot the city," Mayor James H. Blake requested that every able-bodied man exempt from military duty join Committees of Safety in each ward.

Washingtonians made one last attempt to hold off the British as whites and free blacks worked together to throw up barricades at Bladensburg. The British advanced nevertheless and took the city on August 24, 1814. After burning many of the government buildings, they left town the next night.

Officials who assessed the damage observed that most of the plundering had been done "by the knavish wretches about town who profited of the general distress." Mayor Blake defended his own evacuation of the city, and reported that when he returned he found great agitation and alarm due to the fact that arms and ammunition had fallen into the hands of a "certain population." Resolutions were "adopted that every white male citizen should continue up the whole night and patrol (sic) the streets." The Mayor himself, armed with his musket, patrolled the city at night. Justice of the Peace William Thornton, who had "saved" the Patent Office, said that he had appointed a guard at the President's House and the Capitol "to prevent plunderers who were carrying off articles to the amount of thousands of dollars." The Washington police were not derelict in this situation, for the Intelligencer recorded that they "were nearly all absent on military duty" while the capital was being ravaged.

Partial destruction of the city renewed the fears of Washingtonians that the capital would be moved. Prominent Washington socialite, Mrs. Margaret Bayard Smith, noted in her diary, "I do not suppose Government will ever return to Washington." Such fears were not allayed until Congress passed a bill on February 3, 1815, ordering the rebuilding of the federal offices on their former sites. Police officers returned to their normal roles, and citizens again began complaining about their inefficiency.

* * * *

Another major police reorganization would be made in 1820-21 following half a dozen years during which citizens from the Mayor on down took turns criticizing the police. In June 1817, Mayor Benjamin G. Orr told the City Council that the laws in the city were "not as defective as their execution is remiss and negligent." Lack of a suitable penitentiary or workhouse and inefficient enforcement of the laws created a situation in which "vice, in every odious form, roams the city unrestrained." He recommended doubling the four-man police force, but the City Council authorized the appointment of only one additional constable.

Five men proved to be little better than four. Citizens continued to complain about shooting near the streets and public walks, garbage in the canal, stone throwing among youths, unenforced regulations regarding taverns, and gangs roving the streets. Words from "A Subscriber" to the Gazette summed up the prevailing public opinion: "Our police regulations are good, but the officers are very remiss in executing them."

The Council responded to public pressure by attempting to make enforcement of the law more financially rewarding to the police. A new fee system made it possible for the officers to supplement their base salary of $100 per year. For example, they received seventy-five cents for every person taken to the temporary workhouse on commitment by the mayor; for publicly whipping slaves, the fee was fifty cents each.

A rash of fires in the spring of 1819 led to the creation of vigilante groups to patrol the streets at least during the night. The Council authorized the Mayor to offer $500 reward for the apprehension and conviction of anyone who may have been involved in causing the fires. Newly appointed Mayor Samuel Smallwood also recommended a review and possible revision of the laws concerning police constables.

A new charter in 1820 reaffirmed the power of the Corporation "to establish night watches or patrols" and to regulate blacks, slave or free, and other "disorderly" people. The Council promptly divided the city into six wards and then fired all five constables by eliminating their jobs. The Council replaced them with "six discreet, temperate, and respectable housekeepers, one in each ward" to be called "City Commissioners." The new police officers were to be paid $250 annually.

The revised police system was not the answer. In Mayor Smallwood's Address to the
Council in 1821, he concluded that the city "cannot boast" of "a well-regulated, vigorous, and vigilant police," and recommended that the commissioner system of policing be abolished. So the system was changed again. The Mayor was given the power to appoint a police constable in each of the six wards. The police constables assumed the police duties previously exercised by the commissioners, and they reported directly to the Mayor. Pay for the police officers was $100 per year.\textsuperscript{24}

The latest arrangements in police organization satisfied citizens and politicians. There continued to be comments about making "improvements in our city police," officers pocketing fine money, and "unprincipled and ignorant, knavish and unfeeling" officers. However, Mayor Smallwood's observation in 1824 that "the police is at present under a good system" summed up the majority opinion in the mid-1820's.\textsuperscript{25}

\* \* \* \* \* \*

Two events of the latter part of the 1820's illustrated the peculiar problems of policing the nation's capital. The need for a night watchman and "a proper police" on the Capitol grounds was shown by a fire at the Congressional Library room in the Capitol in 1825. This led to the creation of the first regular night police in the city, a "force" of two men guarding only the Capitol.\textsuperscript{26} Other areas of Washington continued to do without a night force, a situation increasingly untenable as the city expanded.

Crowd control at Presidential Inaugurations presented another policing problem peculiar to Washington. "The rabble mob" associated with Andrew Jackson's first inauguarg led some to believe that there were "no police officers placed on duty" for the occasion.\textsuperscript{27} Quite the contrary was true, however, for special police arrangements had been made.\textsuperscript{28} The Marshall of the District of Columbia had requested the police to assist him at the inauguration. However, such a small force was incapable of controlling the enthusiasm of the crowd. From that time forward, the police took greater precautions in dealing with the masses who gathered on inauguration days.

Daily activities, of course, continued to occupy most of the policemen's time. One illegal, but popular, local activity was gambling. Several commentators observed that "there is no city in which gambling is carried to greater excess."\textsuperscript{29} Dozens of congressmen reportedly took up gambling as a diversion. Closely associated with gambling were other vices. One citizen regretted "the progress of vice and immorality in the District of Columbia, which is being promoted by the number of tippling, gambling, and other houses, with which we are infested; and by horse racing."\textsuperscript{30} Historian Wilhelmus Bryan computed that there was one drinking establishment for every ninety inhabitants in Jackson's time as compared to one for every 512 residents in 1912.\textsuperscript{31}

The City Council approached the growing vice problem in two ways. First, in 1830, it passed an ordinance declaring that "no ... device to be used for the purpose of playing or gambling for money ... shall be set up, kept, or exhibited in any part of this city."\textsuperscript{32} Secondly, to help enforce this act, the Council later increased the police force from six to ten members.\textsuperscript{33}

Increasing the number of policemen does not guarantee a reduction in crime. In this case it did not. Chief Justice Cranch of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia told the members of the Grand Jury in 1835 that "offenses have increased beyond the ratio of the population." He went on to cite intemperance as a major contributing factor to the rise in crime, along with "the great number of strangers drawn to this city whereby evil disposed persons are enabled to mingle and pass in the crowd without observation."\textsuperscript{34}

Judge Cranch noted a significant development when he mentioned the changing composition of the city's people. The city had been able to develop with minimal police protection because it had been free from a great influx of foreign immigration and had reverted to a country town whenever Congress was not in session. By 1835 there were indications that the old order was passing. Judge Cranch had recognized the problem of increasing numbers of job seekers. Washington was also not without labor violence. In 1835 the police helped quell a disturbance among laborers on the Washington and Baltimore Railroad.\textsuperscript{35} Of much more significance, however, was a race riot in the city a few months later.

\* \* \* \* \*
The fact that blacks faced legal discrimination in Washington is a matter of record. Black codes were passed in 1812, 1820, and again in 1827. The last-mentioned required blacks to appear in person before the Mayor to show him their papers of freedom and certificates signed by three white residents vouching for the good behavior of each colored family.36

Policemen were apparently more zealous in enforcing the city's black codes than they were in arresting violators of the vice laws. Constance McLaughlin Green concluded that during the 1830's "official statistics showing that half the inmates of the penitentiary and jail were Negroes ... probably reflected the prejudice of the police and the courts quite as sharply as Negro criminal tendencies."37

Mayor William A. Bradley recognized the inequalities of the law in 1835. "Our police regulations ... lead to much oppression on the poor and ignorant, particularly on the free negroes." Since policemen received fees whether suits for alleged infractions of the law were lost or won, "a strong inducement is held out to the officers to take out legal processes without due examination of the grounds of action."38 Moreover, since policemen received as compensation part of the fines collected, they found it profitable to enforce the law fining free blacks $10 for being out after 10:00 P.M., even when they were returning from the market or worship on Saturday night.

The major manifestation of the racial tension that existed in Washington in the Jacksonian era was the race riot of 1835. Riots of one sort or another were not uncommon in United States history, and they occurred frequently in the 1830's. Historian David Grimsted has counted thirty-seven riots in 1835 alone. Causes included "ethnic hostilities; religious animosities; class tensions; ... economic grievances, moral fears over drinking, gaming, and prostitution; political struggles; the albatross of slavery;" and, as in the case of Washington, "racial prejudice."39

This Washington riot was touched off when a young male slave tried to kill his owner, Mrs. William Thornton, widow of the architect who had designed the Capitol. Word quickly spread that the slave had been inflamed by abolitionist literature. Mrs. Thornton, meanwhile, "convinced that the slave had simply been drunk, hid him in her home and tried to sell him to safety."40 The next day, August 6, 1835, the Washington police gave notice that they would rigidly enforce the 1827 act pertaining to free blacks. Before the week was over, federal troops, the militia, and citizen patrols would be used to reinforce the inadequate police.

With tension high, two Washington policemen arrested a man named Reuben Crandell. They committed Crandell to prison on charges of having circulated incendiary (abolitionist) publications among blacks. A mob gathered, but, since Crandell was in jail, they turned their destructive tendencies toward the property of free blacks.41 The first target was the Epicurean House, a restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue run by Beverly Snow, a free mulatto. Snow had reportedly used "very indecent and disrespectful language concerning the wives and daughters of Mechanics." At this time workers at the Washington Navy Yard were on strike. As Grimsted noted, since the Navy Yard was too well fortified to attack, they "leashed their offended dignity and relieved their enforced leisure by terrorizing blacks."42 The mob, including many of the striking laborers, did not find Snow, but they entered his bar and helped themselves. Excitement was even greater the next day, August 12, 1835, when a free mulatto, James Hutton, was apprehended and sent to prison for possessing some abolitionist papers.

The City Council responded to the danger by authorizing the Mayor to adopt such measures as he saw necessary. Mayor Bradley issued a proclamation requiring the police to enforce the 10:00 P.M. curfew regarding blacks and to disperse "any assemblage ... of colored persons." Fearing the mob's appetite for destruction might not be satisfied by devastating only black owned property, federal troops were called in to protect public buildings, and a company of marines was stationed at the jail.43 Major General Walter Jones of the militia and Mayor Bradley led armed citizen patrols to aid the policing of the city. Nevertheless, on the night of August 13, the mob demolished at least one black schoolhouse and several black tenements, broke windows of a black church, burned a black house of prostitution, and further smashed Snow's restaurant.44 Although no lives were lost as a direct result of the disturbances, over twenty persons were arrested. Those arrested were presumably whites, since newspaper
accounts did not indicate otherwise.

In the aftermath of the destruction, even though blacks apparently had little if any responsibility for causing it, authorities singled them out for more restrictive legislation. On October 26, 1836, the City Council passed an ordinance which tightened the controls on granting licences to blacks and forbade them to sell spirituous liquors, or keep a refectory, tavern, or eating house of any kind.

Reuben Crandell, whose arrest had sparked the disturbance, was found not guilty on a charge of publishing inflammatory pamphlets. Beverly Snow, whose restaurant had been trashed, fled to voluntary confinement in a Fredericksburg, Virginia, jail, writing that he had gone to prison for his own safety and would remain there until people were convinced of his innocence.

* * * * *

In other cities, rioting in the Jacksonian era caused a reassessment of police forces. In Boston, for example, had experienced the burning of a convent (August 1834), an assault on William Lloyd Garrison (October 1835), and a riot on Broad Street (June 1837). In response, that city encouraged its police officers to be professionals in the fullest sense, preventing trouble by actively seeking it out before it had time to reach serious proportions. "At the same time, Sir Robert Peel's organization of the London police suggested that a professional police force need not be despotic and pointed to the solution that Americans would accept in the 1840's and 1850's."46

Washington, too, had need of a reorganized and more efficient police force. Blacks and whites would benefit from better police protection, but urban violence was only one indicator of the changes that had taken place in the capital during its first thirty-five years. No longer a sleepy southern village, the city had grown to a permanent population of over 20,000. It was becoming obvious that Washington had outgrown the luxury of haphazard law enforcement. As in other cities, urbanization was forcing the capital to establish a more professional police force.

Notes


5N.I. 28 May 1804. Except where otherwise noted, details of events described in this chapter are based on reports in the National Intelligencer.


8Acts, Fifth Council, pp. 43-44. Emphasis added. Extra Compensation was not to be over $200 per year to all constables. Wards: First, West of 16th Street; Second, East of 16th Street and West of 6th Street; Third Between 6th Street West and 4th Street East; Fourth: East of 4th Street East. Wards are defined in Young and Humphries, Metropolitan Police, pp. 9, 54.


10Green, Washington, p. 183. Population figures were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1810</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Blacks</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>2304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Blacks</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>1437</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acts, Seventh Council, p. 24; Young and Humphries, Metropolitan Police, p. 54.


N.J.L. 24 Aug. 1814; Green, Secret City, p. 22. The Intelligencer noted that the free blacks "acted as became patriots," conducting themselves with utmost order and propriety.

N.J.L. 31 Aug. 1814.

Smith, First Forty Years, p. 101.


Gazette, 10 Mar. 1819.


N.J.L. 3 July 1819. The Intelligencer began carrying minutes of council proceedings at this time.


Laws, Nineteenth Council, pp. 2-3.

Gazette, 15 June 1824.


Smith, First Forty Years, p. 295.


N.J.L. 26 Oct. 1829.


Laws, p. 259. Act was passed 9 Aug. 1832. Policemen were now paid $50 per year in addition to fees and fine money they might pick up.

N.J.L. 8 Apr. 1835.

Washington Mirror, 7 Mar. 1835.


Green, Washington, p. 144; Green, Secret City, p. 39.

N.J.L. 25 June 1835; Mirror, 4 July 1835.


Grimsted, p. 384; N.J.L. 7 Aug. 1835; Green, Secret City, p. 36.

N.J.L. 12 Aug. 1835; Grimsted, "Rioting," p. 377; Mirror, 15 Aug. 1835. In 1830 the free black, including mulatto, population of Washington was 3,129; in 1840 there were 4,808 free blacks.

Grimsted, p. 386.

Mirror, 15 Aug. 1835; Green, Secret City, p. 36; Bryan, History, Vol. II, pp. 145-47; Grimsted, "Rioting," p. 377. These troops came from Fort McHenry, where they had just returned after helping put down a riot in Baltimore city.

Mirror, 15 Aug. 1835; N.J.L. 14 Aug. 1835; Green, Secret City, p. 36; Grimsted, p. 378.


CHAPTER THREE

Urban Growth and Policing Problems
1835-1860

WASHINGTON nearly tripled its population in the quarter century preceding the Civil War. The increased population magnified the need for efficient police services, but the city government moved slowly. Congress was also reluctant to assume responsibility for adequate law enforcement. Local residents were aware of the shortcomings of their police protection. The 1835 race riot had made very clear the need for a regular night police force in the community. Sometimes a posse of police officers patrolled the city between dusk and dawn, but such a procedure was only a stopgap measure. "A Citizen" observed that the men who have duties during the day "cannot nor ought not to be expected to remain up throughout the night." An increase in lawlessness as well as incidents at the White House finally brought a night police into being. Beginning in May 1837 local newspapers took notice of a crime wave. "If the robberies, burglaries, fires, and outrages which have frequently occurred in the city ... do not call forth ... some prompt and active measures of prevention, it will almost be dangerous to go about our streets, either by day or night." In June the Intelligencer reported what was becoming a persistent pattern of crime in the capital: incendiarism in the eastern part, "highway robbery and attempts to murder" in the center, and burglaries in the western part.

Earlier, during the crises of British occupation in 1814, incendiarism in 1819, and rioting in 1835, citizens had formed night patrols. Now, in the face of increased lawlessness, "several respectable citizens ... volunteered to form ... a Night Patrol ... as a substitute for a Night Watch, which has long been a desideratum in this city." The regular police force, without compensation, occasionally aided the citizen patrols.

Irregular night patrols continued to function for the next few years. Citizen interest in participating in the patrols gradually waned, however. The problem was that as soon as the crime rate dropped the patrols were discontinued. After a period of time, and especially when Congress was in session, the criminals would move back in and the cycle would be repeated. It took national attention and Congressional action to obtain a regular, salaried night force.

In 1841 President John Tyler's veto of a Fiscal Bank of the U.S. prompted a new kind of reaction. The editor of the Intelligencer described what happened:

Some gangs of rowdies ... undertook on Monday night ... to give vent to their political feelings by disturbing and disgracing the town ... by entering the enclosures of the President's mansion, and disturbing the President's family by insulting noises ... It is our misfortune that the resources of the city do not enable the Corporation to provide a night-watch or police adequate to the great extent of the place.

Citizens realized that a "riot within the confines of the President's Mansion" was "disreputable to the community" and implied that Washington was "a disorderly, lawless place." (The image of a "crime capital" was worrisome long before the twentieth century.) A public meeting "Resolved ... that an active, efficient, and vigorous police should be established in this city ... under the authority of the General Government." The citizens recognized their dilemma. Local tax bases were not sufficient to finance a large police force, partly because so much of the land area was occupied by tax-exempt government buildings. Although there were no representatives from the District in Congress, that body alone could finance an adequate night guard.

Presidential incidents and citizen appeals at last prompted Congress to take some ac-
tion. The Senate took up a resolution for an investigation of the disturbances at the White House. Senator William C. Preston of South Carolina attributed the disorderly proceedings there "to the inefficiency of the police of the city." His colleague, Senator William R. King of Alabama, agreed, but also remarked that the "impoverished condition" of Washington would not allow the city to maintain a sufficient police force. With its customary urgency, the Senate laid over the subject until the next session.7

Unfortunately for the city, rowdism, incendiaryism, and general lawlessness did not adjourn with Congress. Incendiaryism, a chronic problem in Washington since its founding, became much more serious when rival gangs gained control of the volunteer fire companies.8 There were six quarrelsome gangs in six different engine companies. They would stone each other, run citizens off the sidewalk by racing the engines there rather than in the street, start fires just to have the excitement, and partake in general hell-raising. The skeleton police force was powerless to stop the firehouse gangs.

In May 1842 the House Committee for the District of Columbia issued a report favoring the establishment of a night guard. Committee members reasoned that an adequate watch could probably save the government from immense losses due to fires. They also envisioned protection against the "depradations" of prostitutes and a general increase in public safety.9

Two major objections to the police bill developed in the Congressional debate. In the House, Representatives Cave Johnson (Tennessee) and Mark A. Cooper (Georgia) insisted that their constituents did not want their tax money spent on protecting private property in Washington. The other objection resurrected the fear of possible misuse of the police. Senator Ambrose H. Sevier (Arkansas) called the police bill "a proposition to establish a little standing army." Several congressmen held similar views, and amendments to the bill carefully removed the President's proposed power to appoint the new policemen.10

At the conclusion of this debate in 1842 Congress passed an act creating an Auxiliary Guard "for the protection of public and private property in the city of Washington." The new force was specifically charged to protect "against incendiaries" and to enforce "the police regulations of the city of Washington." The Guard would be supervised by a Captain, to be appointed by the Mayor of Washington. The Captain would name a force of fifteen. Salary for the Captain was set at $1,000 per year; five of the regular guard were paid $35 per month, while the remaining ten officers got $30 per month. Compensation for the Guard was "to be paid out of money in the U.S. Treasury not otherwise appropriated." Rules and regulations for the Guard would be prescribed by a Board consisting of the Mayor, U.S. District Attorney for the District of Columbia, and Washington's corporation counsel. Lastly, Congress appropriated $7,000 to pay the Guard and to purchase necessary and proper "implements to distinguish them in the discharge of their duties."11

John H. Goddard, a member of the Board of Aldermen from the Third Ward and in the grocery business, was appointed Captain. He was armed with a revolver, but the other fifteen members of the force carried only clubs. The Guard had no regular station house, although Goddard mentioned that "an old guardhouse near the old market on Eighth Street ... was used ... to lock up the Negroes." Goddard's reference to the Negroes could be misleading; they were not the principal disturbers of the peace. That distinction went to gangs of rowdies who would come into the city from Georgetown or the Navy Yard in order "to straighten out the town."12

The Auxiliary Guard went on duty on September 5, 1842. Half the force patrolled from 9:00 p.m. to 12 midnight, when the other half went on patrol until 4:00 A.M. Newspaper reports disclosed that they did curb night crime. Gambling houses and "other notorious receptacles of vice and crime" were broken up. During the first two weeks, the Guard made forty-six arrests. Those arrested were disorderlies of both races and several black curfew violators. No crime more serious than "petty theft in Centre Market" was reported during this initial fortnight of Guard duty.

For the next five years the city was generally peaceful. The city police and the Auxiliary Guard on several occasions cooperated in their efforts to provide protection to the citizens. During the inauguration of President James K. Polk in March 1845, the usual crowd of pickpockets was dealt with more effectively by the strengthened police
forces. A labor disturbance between Irishmen seeking one dollar per day minimum wages and laborers working for less was quelled before it reached serious proportions.\textsuperscript{13}

The City Council divided the city into seven wards in 1846, and raised the number of police constables to twelve. However, urban growth rather than any noticeable increase in lawlessness necessitated the enlarged day police force. Mayor W.W. Seaton had the good fortune to preside over the city during the police improvement. His comment that "there is no place of equal population in which there is so little of riot, breach of the peace or serious crime as in this city," holds true for most of the mid-40's.\textsuperscript{14}

* * * *

There was another facet of Washington life, however, which represented the greatest threat to the preservation of peace and order in the city. Pent-up racial tensions which had erupted in "Snow's Riot" in 1835 continued to provide an explosive situation. Although living conditions had not significantly improved for Washington's blacks, any attempt by them to express dissatisfaction with the status quo could lead to violent white reaction. When that happened, the Washington police were called upon to maintain order.

The free black population of Washington nearly doubled during the 1840's.\textsuperscript{15} Stringent laws in Maryland had driven many of them to the capital, "much to the annoyance of the inhabitants." Police were instructed to enforce strictly the municipal black codes. Some Washingtonians also fretted over a local newspaper, the \textit{National Era}, which was avowedly anti-slavery in its editorial philosophy.

When seventy-seven slaves boarded a steam boat on the evening of April 15, 1848, in an attempt to flee the city, it prompted some whites to take vigilante action. About thirty armed citizens overtook the slaves at the mouth of the Potomac. They brought the slaves back to Washington and threw them in prison.\textsuperscript{16}

Word spread that the \textit{National Era} had instigated the affair. That paper's editor, Gamaliel Bailey, denied any involvement. On the evening of April 18th he reported that stones were being thrown at his office, "but the police are striving to do their duty. They may fail; the multitude may overpower them; but . . . we stand by the freedom of the press, whatever the result." At eight o'clock the next morning, somewhat relieved, he wrote that "the mob dispersed last night about 12 o'clock—thanks to the efficient conduct of Captain Goddard and the police."\textsuperscript{17}

Bailey and the \textit{Era} were not yet out of danger. On April 19th a grand meeting was held in front of the Patent Office, immediately opposite the \textit{Era}. The agitators noted that Bailey (as had already been proven!) "lived . . . a stone's throw from the Patent Office." The mob moved on the \textit{Era} office. Bailey again credited the police with rescuing him. The "firmness of Captain Goddard and others saved the Press, and the honor of the city . . . . But had it not been for the effectual action of the city authorities . . . and the President . . . he would most probably have been overpowered."\textsuperscript{18} What the City Council had done was to elect Peter Force interim Mayor (W.W. Seaton was ill), and empower him to appoint as many "special police constables as . . . necessary." Mayor Force obtained citizen support sufficient to complement the regular police.

Postmaster General Cave Johnson was credited with informing President Polk of the seriousness of the crisis. Polk held a Cabinet meeting, proffered "whatever aid" the city authorities thought expedient, and ordered all government workers to refrain from violence and to assist authorities if called upon. By April 24th Mayor Force announced to the Council that "the usual quiet of our city is entirely restored." The police, especially Captain Goddard, emerged from the disturbance with a better reputation and enhanced respect from the community.

The \textit{National Era} riot marked the end of a relatively trouble-free period for the Washington police. As the country moved into the tension-ridden 1850's, the capital city could not avoid troubles arising out of its own and the country's social ills.

* * * *

Two brutal nighttime assaults in February 1849 raised serious questions about the recently lauded Auxiliary Guard. The City Council reacted by authorizing the Mayor to appoint special policemen and to designate regular policemen to supplement the
Auxiliary Guard in order "to secure the peace and quiet of the city."

The special policemen remained on duty through the inauguration of President Zachary Taylor. Pickpockets again flooded the city. One even tried to lift Captain Goddard's wallet while he was awaiting Tyler's arrival in the city! Before the inaugural Goddard took unprecedented action by obtaining descriptions from the New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore police of known pickpockets. He also worked closely with three New York City detectives called in for the occasion. Goddard's efforts were rewarded by a peaceful inauguration week.¹⁹

Emergency, stopgap measures were not solutions to continuing policing problems. The city was approaching a population of 40,000 increasingly heterogeneous people, and the worsening vandalism, arson, prostitution, robberies, and assaults demanded an increased and more efficient force.

Many of the fourteen city police constables had other jobs and duties. At least eight served as constables for Washington County, a separate jurisdiction. They also took advantage of a fee system which enabled them to supplement their meager salaries of $50 per year. In 1849 Mayor Seaton asked the City Council to reform the fee system. "It appears to me that it would be far better for the corporation to create its own officers, allow them suitable salaries, require their time to be given altogether to their police duties, and all fees arising from prosecution to be paid over to the Corporation."²⁰ Many citizens complained that the police constables abused the fee system every day, "not among the rich and influential, but among the ignorant, the degraded, the poor, the outcast and the forsaken."²¹

Finally, on March 11, 1851, the City Council approved a major police reorganization bill that had been debated for nearly two years. The new ordinance established seven police districts conterminous with the seven wards of the city. The Mayor annually appointed, with the advice and consent of the Board of Aldermen, two police officers for each district except for the fourth, for which he named three policemen. Outside business interests were explicitly forbidden. Officers were charged to be on duty until the Auxiliary Guard took over, and the Mayor had authority to require the officers to act as a night watch.²²

The fee system was junked completely and an adequate salary of $500 per year was provided for each policeman. A "Chief of Police of the city of Washington," named annually by the Mayor, would supervise the city police officers. The Chief's compensation was originally set at $500, apparently because the Chief could also serve as police magistrate and receive between $350 and $500 for that job. In 1852, the Chief's salary was doubled. Generally, the new police system seemed to provide adequate administrative reform for a force tainted with corruption. If the officers selected were reliable and honest, the system should work.

Congress doubled the Auxiliary Guard at approximately the same time that the City Council reorganized the day police.²³ The Mayor now had authority to appoint forty seven police officers for the city: fifteen day police, thirty Auxiliary Guards, a chief of Police, and Captain of the Guard.

As expected, John H. Goddard was named Chief of Police and thus held both supervisory positions in the dual police system. Technically, Goddard had a twenty-four hour work load. Mayor Lenox justified his double appointment by arguing that "unity and efficiency of action by these two police forces" demanded "one controlling authority." Lenox recommended the office of Lieutenant of Police be established to assist Goddard and to assure that someone of authority was on duty around the clock.

The Washington News went further than that, recommending that someone besides Goddard be named Chief of Police. The News doubted "the propriety of paying a Captain of a night watch, one thousand dollars per annum, and the same individual five hundred dollars more as Chief of Police, whose duty it is to supervise the police in the day."²⁴ The paper also challenged Goddard for serving as a justice of the peace and police magistrate in addition to his other duties. Pressure generated by the News' criticism forced Goddard to give up part of his duties. Horatio N. Steele, formerly Deputy Marshal for the District of Columbia, was named Chief of Police on September 15, 1852.

* * * * *

15
Full-time supervision for both forces was not a cure-all for the inefficiencies of either force. Vandalism, arson, prostitution, robbery, assault, and juvenile delinquency continued to worsen. Complaints alleged that the Auxiliary Guardsmen "sit about the corners of streets either asleep or smoking cigars, instead of walking their rounds." Mayor John Maury employed additional police in the spring of 1853 to supplement the thirty-one-man night Guard in an attempt to curb the crime wave.

By July 1853 James H. Birch had replaced Goddard as Captain of the Guard. New rules stipulated that members of the Guard could be dismissed for engaging in any business besides their police work or for "a single instance of intoxication." Other attempts to improve Guard effectiveness included the requirements that members go on duty at 8:30 P.M. and leave their beats at daybreak. Four of the Guard resigned rather than observe the new regulations; others continued to go about their inefficient ways.

Charges of corrupt practices were levied frequently against the day force. Gamblers and gambling, long a plague in Washington, were allegedly given protection by the police. Although Horatio Steele received initial support as Chief, too many of his subordinates were known to "loiter about Magistrates' Offices." Several day policemen openly disregarded the law about holding other positions. A system less than two years old was in danger of collapsing.

Partially as a result of police inefficiencies, rancorous volunteer fire companies still terrorized the city. The City Council tried to mitigate that problem by requiring the police in the city to take possession of the fire fighting apparatus so as to put out a fire when a fire company refused to do so! "Drinking, gambling, carousing . . . indecent, disorderly, or noisy conduct in or about" the engine houses was to be broken up by the policemen. In the autumn of 1853 the City Council prescribed revised rules and regulations for the city police. The Chief of Police, as general supervisor, was held accountable for the efficiency and general conduct of the police. He was to be in his office in City Hall "before nine o'clock" and to make daily reports to the Mayor about everything affecting the peace and order of the city. The chief could not absent himself from the city without the consent of the Mayor.

Subordinate officers were required to report to the Chief every morning with a list of all daily arrests. As in 1851, each officer was directed to devote his whole time to his police duties. A reaction to citizen complaints led the Council to include the provision that "No police officer shall, while on duty, use any kind of intoxicating drink or enter any tavern or place where intoxicating drinks may be sold, nor enter any house except in the immediate execution of his duty, nor stay in or about the offices of police magistrates except when required to be there in the discharge of some duty." To improve public relations, the City Council ordered the police to "be civil and respectful to the public" and "not at any time make use of violent, coarse, or insolent language, or use any weapon except in the case of obvious necessity." If strictly enforced, these rules, like those for the Auxiliary Guard and the Chief, would seem to insure an improved police force.

The City Council granted the day policemen a pay raise starting in January 1855. Salaries were increased to $600 per year for the regular police officers. This gave the officers compensation roughly equal to what other cities paid, and hopefully better pay would attract and retain better officers.

Yet vandalism, petty thievery, and incendiaryism continued to bring forth citizen complaints. More serious charges renewed fears about the abuse of police power to further political ends.

* * * * *

In the spring of 1854 the Know-Nothings in Washington displayed their intense anti-Catholicism by seizing a marble stone donated by the Pope for use in the Washington Monument and throwing it in the Potomac. This incident also demonstrated that the Know-Nothings were of sufficient numbers in Washington to have some political clout.

16
In June 1854 John Towers, supported by the Know-Nothings, won the mayoralty election. Towers began appointing his Know-Nothing friends to office “with full determination to put out of office naturalized citizens and members of the Roman Catholic Church.” Some of the political appointees were named to the city police forces, including the nomination of John Davis to replace Horatio Steele as Chief of Police. Soon thereafter “A Friend to Law and Order” complained that the police were not curbing political disturbances because “their sympathies were so actively enlisted” on the Know-Nothing side. Disturbances marked the holiday celebrations at the end of 1854 as Know-Nothing influence seemed to pervade the city and the police.

Objective law enforcement continued to deteriorate during Mayor Towers’ two-year term in office. Near the end of his tenure the News observed that “our police as a body, is worthless . . . many of the very men whose duty it is to arrest offenders are discovered to be their associates in crime.”

Virtually the only way to clean up the police was to remove Towers, since the Mayor had the authority to appoint the force. In 1856, William B. Magruder defeated Silas H. Hill, the Know-Nothing candidate, in a relatively quiet election. At his inauguration Magruder called upon the City Council to support his effort “to see that the laws . . . are enforced, that the peace of the city is preserved.” In a message to the Circuit Court he labeled “the police department so inefficient that a citizen has been murdered in the streets, and the murderer suffered to escape, even after he had been arrested, and other high crimes and misdemeanors have been committed.”

Mayor Magruder then proceed to nominate James Baggott to replace Steele as Chief of Police and fired twelve of the police officers who had been appointed by Mayor Towers. Even more sweeping changes were being made in the Auxiliary Guard—the entire force was fired! John Mills, former bootmaker, was named to succeed James H. Birch as Captain of the Guard.

Meanwhile, the Know-Nothings did not go down without a fight—literally! Near the end of a Know-Nothing rally, a riot broke out. “The order of the city, the law, and its officers were trampled on and abused almost without stint.” Mayor Magruder was hit by a stone, and when Captain Mills came to his rescue he “was himself stunned and stricken to the ground by a slug shot directed against the back of his head.” Several police officers were similarly attacked and bruised.

For the first six months of 1857 there was relatively little serious crime reported in Washington. President James Buchanan’s inauguration attracted more than the usual number of criminals to the city, but the regular and special police on duty for the occasion preserved the peace.

However, a few days after the inaugural, some police officers on duty at the Executive Mansion apparently were neglecting their duty while thieves made off with some goods. For this conduct, “in the highest degree reprehensible,” Mayor Magruder dismissed the officers on the spot. Magruder’s action was enthusiastically endorsed by the News. Even Magruder’s attempts to weed out the undesirables, however, improved the police only slightly. Soon they were again overcrowded in the struggle to maintain order in the city.

Although the Know-Nothings had been defeated in the 1856 mayoralty election, they were only warming up for the 1857 city elections. On election day a group of “Plug Uglies” from Baltimore descended on the city to help the local “Chunkers” and “Rip Raps” prevent naturalized citizens from voting. Chief Baggott and his men, acting on a tip, went to the train station to keep check on them. They described the Plugs as “rowdies, [with] hair closely cut,” “mean looking persons,” and “suspicious.”

While trouble was brewing, the police officers distributed the ballot boxes to the various precincts. At 9:30 A.M., the Plugs, Chunkers, and Rip Raps assaulted a line of about one hundred voters, of whom over two-thirds were naturalized citizens, in the first precinct of the Fourth Ward. Police Officer B.T. Watson described what happened: “The rocks flew like hail, mixed with pistol balls . . . I expected every minute to fall.” After Chief Baggott and others were reported wounded, and the “impudent disturbers of the peace were thus allowed to range up and down without molestation,” Mayor Magruder requested President Buchanan to call out the marines.

About one hundred marines marched on the rioters. The Plugs and their cohorts
now armed themselves with a "six-pounder brass swivel" cannon, and prepared to resist the troops at Northern Liberties Market. They did not use the cannon, but retreated, hurling stones and firing revolver shots at the marines. In response, the marines opened fire. As a result of the exchange, eight people were killed, including an "innocent bystander." At least twenty-one were wounded.\textsuperscript{39}

In the wake of Washington's bloodiest riot yet, another reexamination was made of the police force. A Grand Jury investigation concluded the obvious: "In view of all the circumstances, we declare our opinion that the police force, as at present organized, is not adequate for the purposes intended."\textsuperscript{39}

Despite such warnings and the bitter experience of the riot, very little was done to head off what became an even worse police situation during the next year. Chief Baggott retired, apparently without being forced out and with his reputation intact. The new chief, Frederick Augustus Klopf, was immediately confronted with a continuous crime wave of very serious proportions.

\* \* \* \* \*

The latest local outbreak in crime was reflective of a national trend in the turbulent 1850's. Newspaper accounts noted numerous " outrages of a most audacious and alarming character," not only in Washington but in other cities as well.\textsuperscript{40} Locally, the situation "reached such an alarming extent as would almost seem ... to justify the action of vigilance committees."\textsuperscript{41}

After weeks of disturbances in the fall of 1857, including firemen's riots, rowdism, and an attempt to stab Captain Mills of the Auxiliary Guard, the City Council passed a bill authorizing the Mayor to appoint twenty-five special police officers to serve under the Captain of the Auxiliary Guard. For two dollars per night, the special policemen were to work from sunset to sunrise to preserve the peace of the city.

Preserving peace was an extremely hazardous business during the last two months of 1857. The city was "a perfect hell" according to the \textit{News}. At least ten policemen were injured in the line of duty. Injuries ranged in severity from that of Auxiliary Guardman Benjamin Klopf, who was shot in the left eye, and was in "very critical condition" for days, to that of William Lloyd (A.G.), who was injured by a blow across the face while quelling a riot.\textsuperscript{42} The \textit{Star} was correct in asserting that "to charge a body of men who have been thus made and bruised in the discharge of their duty, with cowardice and inefficiency, is ungrateful as well as unjust."\textsuperscript{43}

The Council tried to aid the beleaguered policemen by making illegal the carrying of dangerous weapons, defined as "dagger, pistol, bowie-knife, dirk-knife or dirk, club, slung-shot or brass or other metal knuckles." Several convictions were reported under this law, but lawlessness continued nevertheless.

Another response to the breakdown of peace and order in the city was the passage of a new police law in January 1858. This law created a new police district in the northern part of the city, making ten districts in total. Twenty-seven police officers or city constables would be distributed in these ten districts. Their uniform would consist of a blue frock coat and pants, with white stripes on the pants, and a cloth cap with a badge marked "City Police." Two months later the policemen were advanced $30 each to pay for their uniforms.

Uniformed or not, the police of the city were not effective. Newspaper accounts of the first six months of 1858 practically ran red with lurid accounts of bloodshed due to a variety of crimes. The "Swampoodle" or "Happy Hunting Ground" of the Fourth Ward was the scene of nightly disturbances. Fire companies once again ran amok causing injuries to Chief Klopf, policemen John Carter, and others. The police were helpless, partially because of their own negligence.

Citizens finally decided to take vigilante action. At a March 31st public meeting grievances were aired: "As it was now, our citizens were in danger of being shot while walking the streets attending to their business, and without any provocation." City authorities were requested to fire police officers who were neglecting their duties. Committees of Five were set up in each ward to "form a patrol guard of the citizens of their respective wards." This action received City Council sanction a few days later. In addition, the Council authorized the Mayor to appoint a temporary police force of one hundred men, of whom twenty-one were to be mounted. By joint resolution the Coun-
cil directed that an application be made to Congress for an increase in the Auxiliary Guard.24

In early April Congress began consideration of proposals to provide better police protection in Washington. The Senate District Committee’s Report stressed the urgency of the situation and defined the causes of police inefficiency:

The inefficiency of the Police grows out of a number of causes. First and foremost is its feebleness; next, the want of proper responsibility. A police appointed by one power, and paid by another, is very likely to be inefficient. But that which, perhaps, imparts its greatest inefficiency is the fact that it is composed, to a great degree, of active political partisans.45

Having heard the District Committee’s Report, the Senate debated a police bill proposed by that committee’s chairman, Albert G. Brown of Mississippi. Several Senators, including William H. Seward and Stephan A. Douglas, acknowledged “that life is not safe in this city at present.” Others theorized that Congressmen themselves set poor examples for the local citizenry. That many politicians were addicted to gambling was common knowledge. More sensational, however, was the caning of Charles Sumner by Preston (“Bully) Brooks on the Senate floor in 1856. Three years later Congressman Daniel Sickles again shocked the capital by killing his wife’s lover, Philip Barton Key, in Lafayette Square.46

Critics of the police bill employed the traditional opposition arguments. Senators Andrew Johnson of Tennessee and Alfred Inverson of Georgia spoke for those opposed to “paying a uniformed police out of the public Treasury to take care of this city.” Other criticisms of Brown’s police bill focused on its recommendation that the President be given power to appoint the Chief of the Auxiliary Guard. Some feared the creation of a “little Praetorian guard,” which could potentially endanger the rights of citizenship.47

Proponents of a reorganization of the Washington police argued that Congress had a duty to protect the public property, foreign ministers, and other people drawn to the city on account of the federal government. In reference to the objection about the President’s appointive power, Senator Brown retorted that the police was “inefficient, contemptible, and disgraceful . . . because it is mixed up in . . . municipal elections.” The only way to correct that situation, he argued, was to put the police “beyond city influence” both in terms of funding and appointment.48

The Senate finally passed a bill which called for the establishment of a one hundred man Auxiliary Guard, whose chief would be appointed by the President, and whose members should be paid by the federal government. However, a similar bill fell six votes short of passage in the House of Representatives.

While Congress was debating, the city government was taking measures to prevent a recurrence of violence in the 1858 elections. Mayor Magruder appointed up to thirty special policemen in each precinct to aid the regular police on election day. All the police were allowed to carry arms, while no one else could “carry weapons without incurring heavy penalties.”

Despite these precautions, violence did erupt on election day. Police Officer A.R. Allen reacted to a brickbat thrown at him by firing into a crowd. Some in the crowd fired back, and the exchange led to the death of “an Irishman,” apparently from one of Allen’s shots. Some of the police “showed themselves extremely bigoted, partial, and unfit for their duties.” The Star’s conclusion seems substantiated: “The election yesterday proves that rowdism is not subdued in this city, and that, notwithstanding the unusual police arrangements made, ruffians did . . . [prevent] a free, full, and unawed expression of public sentiment in the manner of depositing ballots.”49

In the election, tainted as it was, James G. Berret beat Richard Wallach in the mayoralty race. In his first significant communication to the City Council, Berret asked for an increase in the force and that it be “so organized as to prove a terror to all evil disposed persons, and secure the confidence of the entire community.”50

In a long editorial in the edition of June 15th, the Star pointed to the Mayor’s message to confirm that paper’s position that

for six months past, lawlessness has ruled here . . . [and] hardly a single arrest of those participating in such outrages has been made . . . the portion of the police disposed to do their duty
With this background, the 1860 city election promised to be controversial—and it was. Mayor Berret defeated Richard Wallach, an Independent, by a majority of twenty-four votes out of 6,844 cast. But those returns were so stained by Berret’s partisan use of the police that his election was legally as well as ethically questionable.

Both the Intelligencer and Star reported a great deal of disorder on election day. The police, “instead of interfering to prevent outlawry, pandered to its perpetuation by arresting innocent persons who were attacked, and permitted the attacking parties to go ‘scot free’.” Policemen themselves were accused of openly mixing in with and supporting those who were interfering with Wallach’s supporters. In a lengthy editorial, the Star described the depths to which the Washington police had sunk and speculated on the consequences:

> Throughout the whole day the police were conspicuous as distributors of Berret tickets, as disbursers of money to pay taxes, etc., for Berret votes, and as flagrant aids and abettors of the ruffians who in the name of the Berret cause were attacking, maiming, and shooting respectable citizens until quite midnight.

> That the Federal Metropolis was by the connivance of its police at the mercy of a murderous mob yesterday afternoon and last night, was so apparent as that we presume there can be no question that Congress will, ere the close of the present session, so revise the police regulations as entirely to separate its police from politics, as has been found necessary in many northern cities.59

The Washington police had abused their power to such an extent that Congress was ready to overhaul the whole system. A commissioner system of police management, recently adopted or in the process of adoption in Baltimore, New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, New Orleans, and St. Louis, seemed the most obvious method to take the police out of politics. Certainly none of the administrative plans tried in Washington during the pre-Civil War period had accomplished that end. Moreover, the police had been consistently inadequate throughout the first sixty years of Washington’s history. Perhaps another reorganization would prove no more of a cure than past reorganizations had been. On the other hand, integrating the dual police system into a metropolitan force held out the possibilities of significant improvement.

Notes

1. U.S. Census, compiled in Green, Washington: Village and Capital, p. 183. In 1830 the population was 18,827; it had reached 61,122 by 1860.

2. N.I., 18 Sept., 1835. The principal sources for the historical material used throughout this chapter were local newspapers of the period.

3. N.I., 29 May 1837; see also, 25, 27, 30 May 1837.

4. N.I., 31 May 1837; 1, 3 June 1837. Other cities had long experience with a constable-citizen night watch, although by the nineteenth century the need for a regular paid night force was apparent. See Lane, Policing the City, pp. 7, 10-12, 21, 96-98; Richardson, The New York Police, pp. 8-11, 18-21, 32-36.

5. N.I., 19 Aug. 1841. Tyler requested that the rowdies not be prosecuted, and they were not. N.I., 24 Nov. 1841.


12. John Clagett Proctor, in Washington Star, 9 Apr. 1844. Goddard’s observations about the Guard were expressed in an interview handed down in the city newspapers. He maintained that the force was not able to get uniforms because the Congress had not appropriated enough money. Apparently grey uniforms were not acquired until 1858. Bryan, History, p. 274.


U.S. Census in Green, Washington, p. 183.

1840

1850

Total Washington population .......... 23,364 ...................... 40,001
Total Black population ................ 6,521 ...................... 10,271
Free Blacks ................................ 4,608 ...................... 6,158
Slaves ..................................... 1,713 ...................... 2,113

N.I., 19 Apr. 1848; News, 22 Apr. 1848; National Era, 20 Apr. 1848.
NATIONAL Era, 20 Apr. 1848.

National Era, 27 Apr. 1848.

News, 24 Feb. 3, 10 March 1849.

News, 18 Aug. 1848.


James Sheahan (compiler), Corporation Laws of the City of Washington to the End of the Fifteenth Council. (To June 3d, Inclusive.) To Which are Added the Laws Enacted Between that Day and October 10. 1853 (Washington: Robert A. Waters, 1853), pp. 142-46.

N.I., 7 Mar. 1851; News, 8 Mar. 1851. Fifteen of the Auxiliary Guard received $500 per year, fifteen others received $400 per year. Each Guard wore on his hat a numbered badge with the inscription “Auxiliary Guard.” Each officer of the Guard had a “short staff” as a weapon. See News, 5 July 1851.

News, 24 July 1852. Emphasis is in original.

News, 24 July 1852.

Sheahan, Laws, pp. 320-24; News, 29 June, 30 July 1853.

Sheahan, pp. 138-39.


News, 28 Mar. 1855. New York City policemen received $700 per year.


News, 12 July 1854; 7 June 1854.

News, 23 Sept. 1854.

News, 3 May 1856.

Star, 13 June 1856; News, 5 July 1856; See also, Star, 4 June 1856; N.I., 4 June 1856, News, 7 June 1856.

Star, 10, 12, 18 June 1856; N.I., 25 June, 2 July 1856; News, 5 July 1856.

N.I., 2 July 1856; Star, 1 July 1856.


News, 2, 3 June 1857; News, 6 June 1857; Star, 1-4 June 1857; Bryan, History, pp. 428-29. The Northern Liberties Market was located at Mt. Vernon Square, K Street at 7th & 8th Streets, N.W.


News, 22 Aug. 1857. Economic troubles and the uneasy political situation in the nation may have contributed to the propensity toward violence at this time. See Richardson, New York Police, p. 115, for a description of similar problems in that city.


Star, 2 Dec. 1857.

N.I., 6 Apr. 1858; Sylvester, D.C. Police, p. 31; Young and Humphries, Metropolitan Police, p. 56.


Star, 28 Feb. 1859. Key was the son of Francis Scott Key.


535th Cong., Ist Session, 1858, pp. 1465-73; Star, 6, 9 Apr. 1858; N.I., 3 Apr. 1858.

Star, 8 June 1858.

Star, 14 June 1858.

N.I., 18, 19 Oct. 1859; Star, 18 Oct. 1859. Star, 26 Mar. 1859. Expenditures were as follows:

Cost to City .................. $34,100 Cost to Fed’l Govt .......... $31,000
Chief & two Lts .................. 3,000 Capt., Aux. Guard .............. 1,000
27 policemen .................. 16,200 50 Aux. Guards .............. 30,000
Uniforms for same .............. 2,900
20 Aux. Guards .............. 12,000 TOTAL COST: $65,100

In 1857-58, 6.1% of the city budget was spent on “Law Enforcement”: in 1858-59, 12.3%. See Green, Washington, p. 210.

Star, 20 Apr. 1860.

Star, 25 May 1860.

54 Star, 5 June 1860. Wallach contested the election in the City Council but got only moral support. Berret was sworn in on June 11, 1860, for his second term, which he failed to serve out because of his support for the South when the Civil War broke out. See Star, 7, 11, 12 June 1860. Bryan, History, p. 457.
WASHINGTON'S police force gained national attention in 1860 for its blatant political partisanship, but the mind of the nation was occupied with a more serious problem. Abraham Lincoln's election in November 1860 and his determination to preserve the Union forced the South either to abandon or to execute its secessionist plans. The winter of Southern secession turned into a spring of war between the states.

Washington, as the Union's capital, was a special object of Northern defense during the Civil War. Extraordinary precautions were taken against the possibility of Southern attack. Thousands of soldiers poured into the city to defend it or as a stopover on their way to engage the enemy. Along with the troops came thousands of camp followers: speculators, gamblers, whores, and assorted tramps accelerated the flow of Washington's already transient population. In the midst of all this stood the alleged preservers of local law and order, the Washington police.

Serious local crime problems had racked the city during the last six months of 1860. Areas such as "the Island," with its "tangle of poverty stricken alleys" competed with "Bloodfield," "Hell's Bottom," "Swampoodle," and "Murder Bay" in the proliferation of crime. Contemporary evidence supports historian Margaret Leech's conclusion that "it was a courageous man who ventured to walk alone by night in the ill-lighted streets of the capital of the United States. The inefficiency of the Washington police was as notorious as the prevalence of its footpads and hoodlums." Washington's dual system of police—seventy Auxiliary Guards on duty at night (fifty of whom were paid by the federal government and twenty by the city) and thirty officers and men during the day—was too riddled with politics and inefficiency to provide any semblance of adequate police service.

Surprisingly, Washington survived the campaign and national election in November 1860 with few scars. Southern sympathizers did sack Republican headquarters, the Wigwam, with little police opposition, but at least the police did not interfere at the polling places. Once the general election was over, however, the police reverted to their former laxity. Citizens formed patrols in January 1861, and complaints about the deficient police barraged the city's newspapers.

As Abraham Lincoln's Inauguration neared, tension in the capital city intensified. Some disunionist literature advocated preventing the inauguration by force. Lincoln's supporters had cause for concern. Mayor James Berret had endorsed John C. Breckinridge, the Southern Democrat, in the 1860 election, and he was a supporter of Southern secession. The "National Volunteers," a semi-secret group that included some members of the Washington police, was arming itself in order to support its resolution to "stand by" the South.

With eight companies of regular United States military troops and one hundred special policemen called in to help secure the city, electoral votes confirmed Lincoln's election on February 13th. Ten days later, at 6:00 A.M., Lincoln arrived secretly and safely in the capital city. Inauguration Day itself passed with no major disturbance.

Following Lincoln's announcement that he would hold federal posts in the South, a clash of arms between the sections seemed sure to follow. Within a matter of days the reduction of Fort Sumter by the Confederate forces provided an immediate cause for war.
Washington was a border town as well as the Union capital. Since the loyalties of many policemen were with the South, several "eloped;" others were dismissed when it became obvious that they were security risks. In the face of this disaffection and increasing disorder, the City Council hoped that the United States government would assume the responsibility for maintaining order in the capital city. In May a Provost Guard had begun patrolling city streets at night in an attempt to control some of the crime committed by military personnel. Later in 1861, when the city reduced the force prior to a complete reorganization of the police, the Provost Guard extended its coverage to the daylight hours.  

Ever since the debacle of the 1860 city elections, most responsible Washingtonians had recognized the need to divorce the police from politics. Congress began considering bills to that effect in early 1861. The proposals came not only in response to extra burdens brought on by the war, but also as the culmination of a reform movement that had grown out of almost sixty years of unsatisfactory police service.

One proposal advocated merely stripping the Mayor of his power to appoint the Auxiliary Guard. Of a more sweeping character was a Senate bill "to create a metropolitan police district of the District of Columbia, and to establish a police therefore." Senator James W. Grimes (Iowa) stressed the urgency of this legislation citing "a petition of sundry citizens of the District of Columbia, praying for the passage of the metropolitan police bill, for the purpose of protecting their lives and property." By early August both Houses had passed and the President had signed an act thoroughly reorganizing the Washington police.

For policing purposes, Congress merged Washington, the corporation of Georgetown, and the County of Washington into "The Metropolitan Police District of the District of Columbia." A five-member Board of Police Commissioners, named by the President, would administer the police district. Three commissioners had to be from Washington, one from Georgetown and one from the County. The Mayors of Washington and Georgetown were to be ex officio members of the Board. The Metropolitan Police would consist of a superintendent, ten sergeants, and up to one hundred and fifty patrolmen. Expenses of the new force were to be shared by the federal and city governments. The federal government would pay the salaries of the policemen, while the city authorities had to provide support facilities, specifically, "stationhouses ... for the accommodation of the police force ... and for the temporary detention of persons arrested for offenses."

Mayor Berret of Washington was a special object of concern to Congress, and the police act carefully excluded him from any power over the local police. Berret was upset at his exclusion and refused to take a loyalty oath required of Board members. Berret maintained that an ex officio member of the Board did not have to take the oath. His refusal caused him to be labeled a traitor, condemned as unfit to be a member of the Board, and arrested on a charge of disloyalty. Thrown in prison for a month, he then resigned the mayoralty, took the loyalty oath, and was released from jail.

* * * * *

In creating the independent Board of Police, Congress hoped to separate the police from local partisan politics. New York City had set up a Police Board in 1853, and in 1857 modified the concept. Congress copied this modified plan for Washington. St. Louis, Chicago, New Orleans, and Cincinnati had joined New York and Washington by 1861 in the creation of some form of a Board of Police Commissioners.

President Lincoln appointed Washington's first Board of Police in mid-August 1861, Richard Wallach, J. F. Brown, and Zenas C. Robbins represented Washington City, with Sayles J. Bowen and W. H. Tenney from the county and Georgetown, respectively. The Board had an organizational meeting on August 19th, even though Lincoln had already sent Robbins to New York City to study their police system. Soon thereafter the Board focused its attention on naming a Superintendent and staffing the 160-man force. Candidates for the superintendency included former Chiefs John H. Goddard, John H. Birch, and John N. Davis. The Board decided to bypass the former leadership of the police and name someone not associated with past corruption.

William B. Webb emerged as the Board's choice for Superintendent. Webb was
thirty-six years old and a graduate of Columbian College in Washington. A lawyer by profession, Webb also had held a commission in the D.C. militia, giving him the military background considered important in nineteenth-century policing.\footnote{8}

Staffing the new force needed to be done quickly yet carefully. The Board had authorized the Auxiliary Guard of the City and the constables of Georgetown to continue police work until September 1, with their salaries guaranteed by the Board. After that date the new force would supposedly take over.

Congress had established minimum requirements for appointment to the Metropolitan Police. The prospective officer had to be able to read and write the English language, be a citizen of the United States, and never have been “indicted and convicted of crime.”\footnote{9} The Board of Police added requirements of height (’5’6” minimum), age (not under 25, nor over 45), local residence (two years preceding date of appointment), health (body and mind), and morals (“of good moral character”).

During the last two weeks of August 1861, the Board of Police and Superintendent Webb screened around 1,500 applications for the 160 openings. It soon became apparent that the new force would not be ready for service by the first of September. Nevertheless, the old city police force did expire on that date, and the Provost Guard assumed complete policing duties until the new force might be ready. As befitted the deservedly maligned police, they went out of service just as they has served—amid controversy. The Star reported that “our late conservators of the peace (the ex-police) had a high old time on Saturday night, a rather large proportion of them being out for a frolic.”\footnote{10}

By September 11th, the Board had divided the District into ten precincts and had apportioned the force according to population and land area in each precinct. Those applicants who had been selected and met all requirements, including taking an oath of loyalty to the U.S. Government, began their duties that night. Washington now had a ratio of one patrolman to every 537 inhabitants.

The new force was at first hardly visible, for it had no uniforms, equipment, or even badges. The men were supposed to supply their own hand guns, but were not to carry shotguns, rifles, sword canes, or umbrellas. Within a month, the Board had adopted a uniform similar to that of the New York police, and “revolvers with which to arm the police” were requisitioned from the War Department.\footnote{11} A capital city disrupted by national civil war would put the new force’s peacekeeping abilities to the most severe test.

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Even before the creation of the Metropolitan Police, a wartime pattern of conflict between military personnel and local police was emerging. Arrests of soldiers for violating city ordinances sometimes led to exchanges of gunfire, and in the shooting death of one John H. Howard, a Volunteer. This particular event so angered the military that “hundreds” of soldiers gathered for the purpose of “instantly lynching the four policemen” involved.\footnote{12} Tempers cooled in this instance, but the underlying antagonism remained.

Friction also existed between the Metropolitan Police and the Provost Guard. The Guard, having “acted as city police while the force was being organized, continued to combine military and civil duties.”\footnote{13} In its first annual report the Board of Police complained “that the police force has been often embarrassed in its operations by the interference of the provost guard, the provost marshal persistently refusing to act in concert with the police force.”\footnote{14}

Soldiers often thought the Metropolitan Police should not or would not enforce local laws where they were concerned. Nevertheless, wartime crime statistics indicate that soldiers were second only to “labors” in the classification of those arrested. Nearly one out of six people arrested during the war was a soldier.\footnote{15}

The Washington Police also dealt with such wartime military problems as desertion and the draft. War Department orders instructed the Metropolitan Police to arrest “all persons who are either attempting to evade Military duty or who are engaged in attempts to prevent the operation of the Military law of the United States.”\footnote{16} The draft laws held out the possibility that the police might become brokers for those draftees
seeking substitutes. Superintendent Webb ordered any member of the force who "received money for procuring substitutes" to "report the same" immediately.

Random sampling of police personnel files indicates that some policemen did try to enrich themselves by catching military deserters and/or providing draft substitutes. The Police Trial Board fined Patrolman T. J. Frazier for not reporting and turning in twenty dollars he received for returning two deserted marines to the Marine Barracks. Patrolman Benjamin T. De Vaughn took a more sophisticated approach by procuring the assistance of a private citizen to act as his intermediary. After arresting deserters, De Vaughn would turn them over to one R. F. Magee who would cash them in and split the proceeds.

Draftees sometimes sought the aid of the police in obtaining substitutes. For example, Patrolman R. J. Nicholson was fired for pocketing $125 for every substitute he furnished. Fortunately, however, the Washington Police did not have to deal with draft riots as did their contemporaries in New York and Boston.17

Even though policemen had been excused from military duty initially, they were subjected to the draft when it began operating. There is no indication that the Washington police had the financial backing New York City policemen secured when the New York Board of Supervisors voted two million dollars to provide money for substitutes for their police and firemen. Washington policeman George W. Duvall requested that the draft board allow him more time to obtain a substitute. Duvall had already bought a substitute for his son and was financially hard-pressed to provide one for himself.

* * * *

Equally troublesome to efficient law enforcement were the thousands of camp followers who accompanied the military to Washington. Gamblers, thieves, prostitutes, and assorted riff-raff descended on the city. Disorder, rampant in the city when the Metropolitan Police was created, became even harder to suppress. One foreign observer reportedly thought that Washington had become the "wildest and wickedest city in the history of the world."18

Most prominent among the camp followers were the prostitutes. When General George McClellan built up an army of 200,000 men in the D.C. area in 1861, "the longest and busiest brothel in the world" soon followed. Public consorting between military officers and harlots was especially offensive to the "respectable elements" of the city's population. Superintendent Webb detailed twelve patrolmen along Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House to preserve order "and especially to protect ladies." The triangle south of Pennsylvania Avenue, between Eleventh and Fifteenth Streets, became known as "Hooker's Division." General Joseph Hooker stationed part of his division there in an effort to concentrate the colony of bawdy houses, and the place-name for Washington's red light district became famous throughout the country.19

Prostitutes had always been active in Washington, but now new recruitments came, like soldiers, from the states. "In New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and even Chicago and St. Louis, ambitious madames had closed their houses; and, shepherding a choice selection of their misses, had entrained for the Washington market."20 One wartime tally showed 2,300 white and 1,600 colored prostitutes, "with seven-eighths of them 'colonized' since the war."

Gambling, long a common diversion in Washington, became even more widespread during the war. Some of "our most celebrated and distinguished statesmen ... rubbed elbows with professional gamblers.... Senators and Members of the House did not mind having their salary vouchers cashed for gamblers by the Sergeant-at-Arms."21 Juvenile delinquency, thievery, homicides, besides gambling and prostitution on an unprecedented scale, finally caused the Washington police to attempt a crackdown.

In 1862 Congress authorized the police, upon the written report of any policeman or two householders, to enter suspected gambling and/or whore houses, "arrest all persons there found offending against the law," seize any gaming paraphernalia, and close the house.22

Cooperating with the Provost Guard, the police began raids upon houses of ill-fame as well as wholesale arrests of other criminals and vagrants. The criminals were
sometimes "paraded on the avenue preparatory to being sent off in the train." Trailing them was "a fife and drum corps, playing 'The Rogue's March,' and a jeering troop of men and boys." 23 In one notable attempt to drive prostitutes out of town, seventy alleged harlots, who also had "Southern sympathies," were forced to embark for Richmond one cold January day in 1863. These practices may have publicly identified and removed some criminals, but they did not reduce crime.

Many prostitutes were reassured by their contacts on the police department. The Provost Guard even captured city policeman Resin Pumphrey in one of its raids. Pumphrey was fired from the force when the internal Police Trial Board did not believe his story about being in the house in disguise (undercover?) to gather evidence. 24 Another policeman, John Leach, was killed in a fight arising out of his courtship of Sarah Bowen, a prostitute.

What efforts the police made to suppress prostitution and other crimes were often undercut by easy bail, an overloaded court docket, and inadequate prisons. In the words of the Board of Police, the county jail was "a disgrace to the District." 25 "Workhouses," used as both a house of detention and a poorhouse, served neither function adequately. The old District Penitentiary had been taken over by the Government as "an ordinance storehouse," and convicts were sent from the District to the State Penitentiary at Albany, New York. There were no houses of correction for juvenile offenders in the District, and, according to the Board, "to imprison them in our jails only graduate them in crime." 25

Superintendent Webb cited the unrelenting crime wave in his detailed and quite realistic September 1863 quarterly report. He acknowledged that "the city swarms with thieves and burglars, and dangerous characters of all sorts." To control prostitution, Webb favored licensing brothels, "but this is so repugnant to public sentiment in this country that such a course is not practicable." Therefore, the superintendent recommended registering prostitutes, excluding them from places of public resort and from the most used thoroughfares, under severe penalties. Licenses of restaurants and taverns which harbored them would be revoked. Without an increase in personnel, however, Webb envisioned little hope of curbing crime. 26

* * * * *

The relatively large geographical area of the Metropolitan Police District reinforced the argument for increased personnel. Washington City alone contained 230 miles of streets and 77 miles of alleys. Allowing for men lost due to sickness, absences from other causes, double beats, and special assignments each patrolman in the city was responsible for four miles of territory. Considering that a half-mile beat was recommended, the Board admitted that guarding a four-mile beat "is simple impossible, and it is not attempted." 27

Congress was generally unresponsive to repeated requests for an increased police force. The only addition to the force during the Civil War years was the creation of a six-man detective bureau in 1862. Congress even decreased the number of patrolmen when it required the Board of Police to establish "a sanitary police company ... not exceeding ten persons, who shall be selected from among the police." 28 The Sanitary Company was especially concerned with abating smallpox epidemics and arresting violators of local health laws.

Working conditions for the nineteenth-century Washington policeman were unpleasant. Hours were long, accommodations poor, and pay low. The Superintendent and sergeants were supposed to be on duty at all times. Privates split two twelve-hour shifts, working seven days a week. Station houses, besides serving as detention centers for those arrested in each precinct, were also intended to serve as accommodations for police officers. Congress made it the responsibility of the local jurisdictions to provide for stations. The station houses were generally little more sanitary than the polluted streets. In September 1863, Superintendent Webb attributed a high rate of police sickness "to the want of comfortable and wholesome accommodations." The Superintendent reported in January 1865 that three station houses were in good condition, but when inspecting "the condition of the places called station-houses in the other precincts, the horrors of the 'Black Hole' and of Austrian dungeons came unbidden
before our mental vision."29

Pay for the Metropolitan Police was set by the 1861 congressional legislation. At that time, the Superintendent received $1,500 per year, sergeants $600 per year, and patrolmen $40 per month. Even then the Board of Police acknowledged the deleterious effects of low pay, noting that "the compensation is insufficient to induce permanency."30

The Board made identical pleas for increased salaries in 1862 and 1863. They noted "that of all the officers of the government the policeman is the worst paid." Yet the policeman was expected to protect the public at the risk of his own life. The government paid "the police officer of the Capitol $110 per year; watchmen in a department, from $550 to $600; and lamplighters, $600." The reports concluded that "it is a simple act of injustice to make the distinction against the patrolman."31 Comparisons with non-government workers indicated that the patrolman was making less than a day laborer and less than half the wage paid to mechanics.

Wartime inflation placed additional burdens on the police officer's salary. The cost of living in Washington rose over one hundred percent during the war years. Estimates predicted that inflated prices necessitated an income of $1,333 to care adequately for a family of five.32 The patrolman was supposed to get by on $480 per year! The Board of Police was well aware that such conditions made the policemen very susceptible to corruption.

While mechanics, laborers, bookbinders, drivers of street cars and others went on strike for higher pay, the Washington police only begged the mercy of the legislators. In 1863 the Washington and Georgetown city governments voted an additional compensation of $10 per month to the policemen, hoping that Congress would reimburse them for the expenditure. Policemen petitioned Congress the following year and sent delegates to congressional committees and the city government to lobby for a pay raise. The Star strongly endorsed the petition, urging Congress to give the policemen "such pay as will allow them to live respectably and support families comfortably."33 Congress did respond by authorizing an increase in the patrolmen's salary to $60 per month, but directed that the burden of the increase be borne by local taxpayers. This was not exactly in compliance with the District's desires or abilities and once again demonstrated the complexities of multi-government financing.

Sources substantiate the fact that long hours, unfit stations, and low pay damaged the morale and efficiency of the Washington police. Recruitment of top quality men was hindered from the very beginning. Thus very mediocre men, who found police work better than unemployment, most often staffed the police force. Of course, that generalization does not mean that all members of the force were ineffective.

There was no formal training period. The policeman was given a beat to patrol and expected to learn by experience how best to perform his duty. Furthermore, the Metropolitan Policeman was usually unprepared to cope with the challenges inherent in the racial composition of Washington's population.

Since the founding of the capital city, approximately one out of four inhabitants had been black. By 1865, some estimates put the Civil War total of black residents at 51,000, thus approaching a ratio of one out of three.34 The start of the war brought an influx of fugitive slaves, who at first were not free from arrest as runaways. Until the spring of 1862, when slavery was abolished in the District and runaway slaves were declared free, the police often engaged in slave catching. When the municipal black codes were repealed shortly after the abolition of slavery in the District, the police faced the difficult task of protecting blacks against an increasingly hostile white population.

The decision in 1863 to recruit black troops in Washington was another irritant to race relations. In the course of the war, the District furnished to Union forces 3,269 black recruits, despite "a report that one of the city police had declared he would put as many bullets through a nigger recruit as he would through a mad dog."35 This extremist talk might not be indicative of the attitude of the police force as a whole, but it is unreasonable to assume that the police rose above the racism prevailing in the rest of society.

Official statistics dealing with the three years 1863-1864 indicate a substantial turn-
over in personnel. An average of twenty policemen per year were fired for serious violations of the rules and regulations. Another twenty-five policemen resigned each year, many of them doing so rather than face forced removal after a hearing. The Board of Police admitted that it was "a good deal embarrassed" by the necessity to remove so many men from the force, but asserted that "the insignificance of the pay of the men . . . precludes the possibility of imposing fines by way of punishment. The only other remedies are dismissal and reprimand." 36

A random sampling of the Police Trial Board hearings disclosed that drunkenness was the most common disciplinary problem on the force. Out of a sampling of twelve policemen who were named to the force during the Civil War, six were dismissed for intoxication. 37 Superintendent A.C. Richards, who replaced Webb when the latter resigned in November 1864, indicated in his first official report to the Board that discipline "in three or four precincts is entirely satisfactory; in other precincts too much laxity prevails." He said he would shortly propose "a course to rid the force of all inefficient or incompetent men, whether officers or patrolmen." 38 It is unfortunate Richards could not have gotten rid of one inefficient officer in particular before the spring of 1865.

* * * * *

John F. Parker was one of four Metropolitan Policemen detailed to the White House in early 1865 to help form a bodyguard for the President. Concern for Lincoln's safety had increased as the war neared an end, and the policemen's duty was to remain close to the President, guarding the hallways inside the White House and accompanying him when he left it. 39

Why anyone wanted John F. Parker as the President's bodyguard is a serious and troublesome question. One of the original appointees to the Metropolitan Police, Parker's record was poor. He had been found guilty by the Police Trial Board in a case involving his use of "profane language" to a citizen and "vile and insolent" language to a superior officer. He was later charged with "insulting a woman who had asked for police protection . . . abusing a superior officer, and with being found sleeping on a streetcar." 40 The other members of the White House detail were doubtless more capable than Parker, although Parker may have been more typical of the force as a whole.

Parker had the 4:00 P.M. to midnight shift on April 14, 1865. He had shown up late for work that day and then had walked over to Ford's Theater in advance of the Lincoln party. He apparently checked out the President's box, found it in order, and awaited Lincoln's arrival. Once the President was in his box, Parker was supposed to occupy a chair at the door of a small passageway leading to the presidential box. Parker left his post, allegedly to go get some ale at a nearby tavern, or possibly to move forward to have a better view of the play, and the access to the President was left unguarded for John Wilkes Booth.

The recently installed police telegraph immediately aroused the whole police force of the city. Superintendent Richards ordered the streets carefully patrolled. Bars were closed for at least the next twenty-four hours by police order. Detectives were ordered to interview witnesses to the slaying. Within four hours of the assassination, Richards ordered a raid on Mrs. Mary E. Surratt's boarding house, a place Booth had been known to frequent. During the next few days, the Washington police arrested several people suspected of being involved in the assassination plot. 41 As a result of the combined and sometimes conflicting police/military investigations, the conspirators were killed or apprehended. Remarkably, the Board of Police absolved Parker for his conduct, and he remained a policeman for three more years.

* * * * *

Lincoln's assassination came at the conclusion of the most costly war in United States history. The nation faced the challenge of reconstructing the union. Washingtonians might have anticipated a return to a more normal existence, but the social dislocation of the war would leave its imprint on the city.

The Washington police should have welcomed the war's end. Removal of most of the
troops would lessen conflicts with military personnel, and the partial evacuation of
those notorious camp followers promised a decrease in the crime rate. Moreover, im-
portant alterations had been wrought in the city police through the formation of the
Metropolitan Police District in 1861. The metropolitan system provided ad-
ministrative procedures superior to those in operation at the war's beginning. Police ef-
iciency could be expected to improve now that the war had ended. However, serious
difficulties within the police department could not be explained away by wartime con-
ditions.

Notes

The "Island" was the area of Southwest Washington cut off by the old B Street Canal; "Bloodfield" was that
area South of 11 Street, S.W., to the old Arsenal and East of 1/2 Street; "Swampoodle" was an Irish area
bounded by 1st Street, N.E., 4th Street, N.W., and F and K Streets, N.W.; "Murder Bay" was in a triangular
area bounded by 15th Street, B Street and Pennsylvania Avenue.

2Star, 15, 17 Jan. 1861. Georgetown, a separate jurisdiction within the District of Columbia, also con-
tained a large number of Southern sympathizers. See Mary Mitchell, Divided Town (Barre, Mass.: Barre

3N.Y., 6 May 1861; Star, 6 May, 1, 2, 3 Aug. 1861; Leech, Reveille, p. 76; Green, Washington, p. 240.
Companies of volunteers sworn into federal service stood guard at night around the White House and public
buildings.


5U.S., Statutes at Large, XII, 320-26. The County of Washington referred to that area within the Dis-
trict of Columbia which lay outside the corporation limits of either Washington City or Georgetown. The
merger of these jurisdictions for policing purposes set a pattern for bringing them together under one gov-
ernment in 1871.

6U.S., Statutes, XII, 320-26. See also, Sylvester, District of Columbia Police, pp. 35-36; Young and
Humphries, The Metropolitan Police Department, p. 64; Proctor (ed.), Washington Past and Present Vol.
109; N.Y., 12 Aug. 1861. Commissioners received five dollars per day for each day of actual attendance at
Board meetings. The superintendent would receive $1,500 per year, sergeants $600 per year, and each
patrolman $40 per month.

7Foosicke, American Police Systems, pp. 76-84; Ketcham, "Municipal Police Reform, A Comparat-
ive Study," pp. 89, 159; Richardson, New York Police, pp. 78-81, 100-08


9Statutes at Large, XII, p. 321.

10Star, 2 Sept. 1861.

11Star, 17, 19, 24, 30 Sept. 1861. The uniforms consisted of blue pants, blue frock coats, caps, and
badges, with distinguishing buttons to indicate different ranks.

12Leech, Reveille, p. 76; Green, Washington, p. 242; Star, 7, 9 May 1861.

13Leech, Reveille, p. 262.

14Report of the Metropolitan Board of Police. 1861, in Report of the Secretary of the Interior, Senate
Executive Documents, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., Ser. 1117, p. 913. Hereafter referred to as Report, followed by
the date of the year in which the report was given. All Reports of the Metropolitan Board of Police are in the
Reports of the Secretary of the Interior during the Civil War years.

15Report, 1862, House Executive Documents, 37th Cong., 3rd Sess., Ser. 1157, p. 666; Report, 1863,
House Executive Documents 38th Cong., 1st Sess., Ser. 1182, p. 739; Report, 1864, House Executive Docu-
ments, 38th Cong., 2nd Sess., Ser. 1220, p. 772; Report, 1865, House Executive Documents, 39th Cong., 1st

16General and Special Orders, 1862-1865, p. 47, Metropolitan Police Department, Record Group 351.

17R. J. Nicholson, Personnel Files, Metropolitan Police Department, 1861-1897. New York policemen
got rewards for bringing in "volunteers." See Richardson, New York Police, pp. 125-26, 129-35; Lane, Polici-
ing the City, p. 134.


21G.R. Brown, History, pp. 326-29; Star, 25 Nov. 1861; Elden F. Billings, "Social and Economic Con-

22G.R. Brown, History, pp. 326-29; Star, 25 Nov. 1861; Elden F. Billings, "Social and Economic Con-

23Star, 3 Apr. 1863; Leech, Reveille, p. 262-63; Green, Washington, p. 251; Reports, 1862, p. 660; 1863,
p. 739; 1864, p. 772; 1865, p. 851.

24Resin Pumphrey, Personnel Files.
Report, 1863, pp. 728-31; Leech, Reveille, p. 262; Green, Washington, pp. 252-53; Star, 26 Sept. 1863.

Star, 26 Sept. 1863. This issue contains Webb's quarterly report in its entirety.

Report, 1861, p. 912; 1862, p. 649; 1863, pp. 721-22; 1864, pp. 761-62. The following is a breakdown of the 1860 population: Washington city: 61,122; Georgetown: 8,733; in the country outside the city jurisdiction: 5,223.

Statutes at Large, XXI, 579. This is the same act that authorized the creation of the detective bureau. Other cities also had sanitary companies. See Ketoham, "Municipal Police Reform." p. 252.


Report, 1861, p. 912.

Report, 1862, p. 650; 1863, p. 723.


Star, 17 Mar. 1864.


Leech, Reveille, p. 253; Also, pp. 57-66, 236-54; Green, Washington, pp. 272-84; Star, 8 Sept. 1862, 16 Jan., 10 Feb. 1863, 5 Aug. 1864.

Report, 1862, p. 651; 1863, p. 727; 1864, p. 767.


Star, 11, 23 Nov., 1 Dec. 1864, 27 Jan, 1865; N.I., 12 Nov., 2 Dec. 1864; Bryan, History, p. 558; Young and Humphries, Metropolitan Police, p. 58; Sylvester, D.C. Police, p. 52. Webb left with praise from all quarters and returned to the practice of law. Richards' background included teaching, post-office work, and service on the Board of Aldermen. Richards served as Superintendent until 1878.


CHAPTER FIVE

Policing in the Reconstruction Era, 1865-1878

RESIDENTS of Washington, D.C., shared in the national uncertainty regarding a return to peacetime conditions. War had produced incessant activity in the capital, some economically rewarding, some morally degrading. What many residents may not have realized was that although most troops and many camp followers would leave, the city could never return to the status quo ante bellum. Operations of the federal government had expanded greatly, and postwar demobilization would not dismantle the bureaucratic machinery needed to reconstruct the nation.

Local government had not changed in form during the war, but reorganization took place shortly thereafter. Following a pattern set by creation of the Metropolitan Police Department in 1861, Congress merged the jurisdictions of Washington, Georgetown, and Washington County into a centralized territorial government in 1871. Three years later a temporary commissioner system of government replaced the territorial arrangement. The Board of Police Commissioners, the independent body appointed by the President in 1861, was not altered until 1878, when Congress abolished it at the same time the commissioner system was made “permanent.”

The end of the war hardly brought about any immediate improvement in the pattern of local crime or local law enforcement. Police Superintendent A.C. Richards believed conditions had actually deteriorated. Criminals attracted to Washington during the war were now preying upon the local populace instead of the military, and the demobilization of troops left in Washington “large numbers of bad men, such as are found in all armies.”

Prostitution, “which abounded in all parts of the District during the war,” was more controlled in the postwar period. The Metropolitan Police showed unusual vigor in suppressing some twenty-eight houses of prostitution in the eighteen months immediately after the war. The police did not attempt the impossible task of eliminating prostitution. Their objective was to limit the localities in which whore houses existed, so “that their inmates are seldom brought unsuspectedly in contact with the innocent and virtuous, as they would be if they were widely diffused in the community.”

The locality which contained most of Washington’s brothels was generally the same as the notorious “Hooker’s Division” of Civil War days. As late as January 1877, Lieutenant Skippon of the fifth precinct listed forty one houses of prostitution in operation in that area. As in earlier decades, a few policemen had very special relationships with some prostitutes, making effective regulation even more difficult.

Drunkenness, like prostitution, was irrepresible. In its 1866 annual report, the Board of Police Commissioners expressed alarm that cases of drunkenness had markedly increased in proportion to the population in the year following the war. For this the Board blamed the corruptive influences of a Liquor Dealers’ Association which had been formed “for the purpose of mutual pecuniary aid in resisting the execution of the law ... as well as to procure the election to municipal offices of persons favoring their views in reference to their business.”

In order to bypass elected city officials in their effort to curb drinking, the Board of Police Commissioners obtained from Congress in 1866 the power to approve or disapprove “all licenses for the retail of intoxicating liquors.” The Board was sanguine about the prospects of liquor license control. They hoped that a careful monitoring of drinking establishments would lessen the “poverty, disease, and crime, public disorder
An assault on one Eva Wilson led white citizens in Northeast Washington to ask and receive permission from the Board of Police to patrol the streets. These same “residents” gave notice to the black people of Northeast Washington that they had better produce the assailant of Eva Wilson “or else.” This had the ominous sound of vigilante law, and blacks rallied in self-defense. At a “colored indignation meeting,” black citizens charged that whites in Washington had jumped to conclusions and blamed the whole race for the actions of a few. They too requested and received Board of Police approval to have twenty blacks serve as special patrolmen. The firm stance taken by blacks helped cool a heated controversy.

The use of blacks as special patrolmen was not surprising, since blacks had voted and served in city government and on the police force for nearly a decade prior to the 1878 controversy in Northeast Washington. Although the Washington City Council tried to resist it, Congress provided for unrestricted manhood suffrage in the District prior to the 1867 city election. Bringing blacks and whites together on equal terms at the ballot box for the first time aroused local anxieties about “violent demonstrations, riot, and bloodshed.” Despite the strong prejudice against the blacks voting, the election was surprisingly quiet. Unlike previous elections in which a partisan Washington police had actually prompted election disturbances, police conduct in the 1867 election was praiseworthy. Superintendent Richards drew special praise for his insistence that one voting line be maintained at the polls, thus preventing whites from pushing out blacks by forming segregated lines.

Richards and his police again played a significant and even-handed role in the 1868 elections. The Superintendent had issued strict orders to the force to take no part in the election other than to vote and to maintain order at all polling places.

In the 1868 election, Sayles J. Bowen, ex-member of the Board of Police, staunch Republican, and sincere champion of black rights, was elected mayor. Joining Bowen’s electoral success were John F. Cook and Stewart Carter, both black, elected to the Board of Aldermen and Common Council, respectively.

Local Democrats were frustrated by Bowen’s election, and they charged that Superintendent Richards conspired to enable Bowen to win. The Board of Police Commissioners held a hearing on the matter in order to clear the air. After listening to testimony from all parties, the Board of Police dismissed the charges against Richards and thanked him “for the sincere and earnest efforts he had evidently made to discharge his duties in an impartial and efficient manner under . . . very difficult circumstances.”

Political violence returned to Washington in the 1869 municipal election. In the second ward several policemen were injured, including Richards, who was struck “on the face” by a stone and then “two or three times with a stick on the arm, bruising him quite severely.” Police fired into a crowd to disperse it, and killed one black in the gunfire. The scene was reminiscent of earlier election-day riots in the capital which had occurred long before blacks voted.

Resistance to Bowen and the civil rights legislation granting blacks equal enjoyment of public accommodations, which he supported, was strong. Even more damaging to Bowen was an increasing city debt and indications that Congress was losing faith in the competence of city government. In the city primaries in 1870, a sizable number of Republicans supported Superintendent Richards for the mayoralty. Richards eventually rejected the nomination proffered by the insurgent group. With Republicans still in disarray at election time, however, Bowen’s opponent, Matthew Emery, won the mayor’s office in a relatively quiet election.

Emery would not serve out his term, however, because Congress established a new territorial form of government for the District in February 1871. A twenty-two member lower house and a non-voting delegate to Congress were the only offices elected by popular vote under this system of “local” government. A Governor, an eleven-member upper house, a Board of Health, and a Board of Public Works were all appointed by the President. The Board of Police Commissioners, not altered in form by the territorial arrangement, remained presidential appointees.

Those fearful of black government in Washington welcomed the diminished power of the local electorate. Elections were quieter in the late 1870’s and police protection at
the polls was no longer needed. Blacks, although a distinct minority among officeholders in the territorial government, received more than their share of the blame when Alexander Shepherd and the Board of Public Works rather quickly led the territory into bankruptcy. Congress responded by abolishing territorial government in 1874. It also abolished all elective offices, and put three presidentially-appointed commissioners in charge of District affairs. Just as the Board of Police survived the creation of the territory, it outlasted its destruction. (Not until 1878, when the commissioner system was made “permanent,” was the Board of Police also abolished.)

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While the Washington police corps was playing a significant role in the postwar adjustment of the city, the force itself was changing internally. Racial integration of the force took place on July 8, 1869, when Charles C. Tillman and Calvin C. Caruthers became Washington’s first black policemen.22

On the whole, the performance of the black policemen seemed no better or worse than that of the rest of the force. Whereas Tillman and his black colleague, Robert Fleet, appointed to the force in the fall of 1869, had exemplary records, others like Caruthers and David E. Chase left the force in disgrace. Caruthers violated the rules and regulations several times before being fired in 1881. Chase, appointed on September 5, 1872, was in constant trouble for over a year prior to his dismissal for drunkenness in 1875.23

Political pull was still important to the Washington policeman, even though he could not engage actively in partisan party politics. In terms of official qualifications, “to have been loyal to our Government during the late rebellion” was the only political requirement for the prospective policeman. After March 1867 Congress required that appointees to the police force must have “served in the army or navy of the United States, and received an honorable discharge.”24

Insistence upon veteran status for appointment pointed out the persistence of the misconception that military training was necessarily good experience for a policeman. The prospective policeman in this period still received very little formal preparation for his duties. His “physical condition, intelligence, habits, temper, and aptitude for police duty” were checked by the Board prior to appointment. If this evaluation was favorable, the applicant could be appointed for a probationary period of sixty days, and then, if found satisfactory, be regularly commissioned as a member of the force.25 The Board of Police never complained about a lack of applicants during the reconstruction period. Rather, they considered only what they classified as first-class prospects.

One woman, Dr. Mary E. Walker, M.D., pressed her claim for appointment to the force in 1878. Walker, an Army nurse during the Civil War, was well-known about Washington as a feminist.26 In a letter to the Washington Post, she insisted that the women of Washington demanded her appointment to the force. She promised to be always “on duty as women’s protector, from young America’s insults, and be the police surgeon of the District of Columbia.” She even offered to give free medical care to the underpaid policemen. The Commissioners reportedly “smiled” at her request, nodded approvingly at her offer of free medical service, but did not appoint her.27

One reason the Board had so many applications on file was the inadequate size of the force. Lack of manpower was a persistent theme and a major reason for police failure in Washington, as it was in other cities. In its 1865 report the Board pointed out the essential argument for a larger force. The proportion of people to police was growing yearly—“consequently the labors of the police have been greatly enhanced: in fact they have become greater than can be properly performed.”28

Congress responded affirmatively to the need for additional policemen in 1866. It authorized the Board of Police to increase the force by one captain, twenty sergeants, and fifty patrolmen, which would bring the force up to two hundred thirty-eight. Because Congress at first failed to appropriate money to pay the new men, however, the Board had to wait several months before actually naming them.

Even with the increase in personnel, the District fell far short of the desired staffing needs. The Board of Police estimated that there should be one policeman for every 500 inhabitants. Furthermore, beats should be short, for example, one mile, and relatively
straight in order to be effectively patrolled. Considering the loss of manpower to
details, many of which dealt with U.S. government functions, sickness, and appear-
ances at court, Board of Police estimates in the mid-1870s placed Washington's ratio as
low as one policeman for every 3,000 inhabitants. Beats were also exceedingly long in
the District. They ranged from five to thirteen miles each, depending on whether they
were covered by a single or double-member patrol. The Board of Police could under-
stand "that, under such circumstances, citizens often complain that they cannot see a
policeman when wanted." 29
The major obstacle to expansion of the Metropolitan Police between 1866 and 1878
was the refusal by Congress and the District governments to appropriate sufficient
funds. When the Metropolitan Police was created in 1861, Congress agreed to pay the
salaries of the officers, with the local governments paying for police facilities. In June
1864 the patrolman's $40-per-month salary was increased fifty per cent. The District,
not Congress, financed this increase, and the district thereafter found itself expected to
pay one-third of police salaries. 30
Of course, the policemen themselves thought they were underpaid, especially in
light of inflation during and immediately after the war. In May 1866 they petitioned
Congress for more money, maintaining that the salary of the Metropolitan Police was
"inadequate for the support of our families, owing to the exorbitant prices now existing
in our markets." The local press and the Board of Police supported the policemen's
request.
Congress did raise police salaries in the same act that increased the size of the force to
238 men in July 1866. The method of financing the increase required the District gov-
ernments to pay one-third the cost. Congressional funding would now pay the major
$1,740 per annum, sergeants $65 per month, privates $60 per month, and detectives $90
per month. However, "a further compensation of fifty per centum upon their respective
salaries . . . shall be paid by the cities of Washington and Georgetown and the Dis-
trick." 31
The policemen appreciated the raise, but they often had difficulty in obtaining it.
The Washington City government was constantly scrambling to come up with enough
money to pay its share of the monthly salaries, sometimes being several weeks late.
When the territorial government led the District to bankruptcy, the policemen again
had to wait for delayed checks. Sometimes the District government issued certificates
of indebtedness which policemen would cash in when money became available.
However, when accounts were settled in July 1874 some policemen discovered that
forged pay certificates had been presented in their names.
All of the delays encouraged corruption and caused real hardships to the policemen.
The Star estimated that "at least two-thirds of the men have been found to sell their pay
in advance to the pawn shops and curbside brokers." 32 Joseph Stone's case illustrated
the policemen's predicament. He had been appointed to the force in 1872 and had
served creditably until 1877, when he was charged with violating the rules of the Board,
specifically, neglecting to pay his just debts. In a letter to the Board, Stone explained
that he had to sign over his pay certificates "at a ruinous discount" to get cash to take
care of his sick mother and sister. Moreover, he was paying $5 per month interest on a
$60 loan he had secured. When Stone was finally terminated in 1879, one of the
grounds for dismissal was that he had failed to pay off his debts.
In the attempt to clear up the tangled finances of the territorial government, the
Commissioners of the District of Columbia trimmed $30,000 from the police budget.
They ordered that after April 1, 1875, the $10 extra monthly compensation the police
had been receiving from the District since 1871 would be discontinued. Privates'
salaries were reduced to $90 per month, two-thirds paid by Congress and one-third by
the District. However, in 1876 Congress undercut the Commissioners by reducing its
appropriation for police salaries from $205,270 to $150,000, and requiring the District
to match the $150,000 out of its own treasury. 33
"Owing to the depressed condition of the finances of the men," the fifteenth anniver-
sary of the force (September 11, 1876) was no occasion to celebrate. Policemen had not
even received the District's share of their pay for two months. Furthermore, the Board
of Police reduced the commutation for expenses of keeping horses from $30 to $20 per
month. Eleven vacancies were not filled. In the end, lack of money forced the cancellation of a planned anniversary banquet and reunion.

The Board of Police also tried to cut costs relating to the maintenance of police station houses. The stations were already in a generally deplorable condition. In five of the eight police precincts, stations were "unsuited" for the purposes of providing lock-ups for prisoners and accommodations for the reserve police force. Some of the descriptions of the stations are almost sadistically humorous. For example, picture the policemen serving the first precinct evacuating their station house as the foundation collapsed, the basement filled with water, and "Lieutenant Gessford and his station-keeper jumped out of the windows of the man-trap to save themselves from injury." 34

Failure to provide a pension for police officers further impaired police morale and efficiency. This became increasingly obvious as several members of the force accrued longevity of service. "The exposures and hardships necessary to a policeman's life," added to advancing years, made a number of policemen unfit for street duty. Some were transferred to station house service, but many remained on patrol. Here the Board of Police had to make a tough decision. Doubts existed concerning whether the Board could "rightfully or legally" dismiss the old and infirm from the force, since members were "appointed for a term co-extensive with good behavior" and could be removed only "for cause." The term "for cause," in the Board's opinion, "must be construed to mean some voluntary act of omission or commission in the performance of official duty, or some moral delinquency affecting their standing as citizens or members of society." 35 Since their salary did not provide enough for savings, to cast off the old and infirm policemen, who had obviously put in many years of reliable service, seemed "inhuman." Yet to continue the old officers in service would detract from overall efficiency. The Board asked Congress that a sufficient pension be established and/or the old policemen be used to police public buildings and grounds. As in many other requests, the Board got no satisfaction from Congress in this respect. 36

The financial status of the Metropolitan Police remained in disarray during the tenure of the Board of Police, although the Board was not completely responsible. Prior to its abolition in 1878, the Board, while protesting, tried to live within the budget imposed by Congress and the District government. Stations deteriorated, promotions were not made, and vacancies continued to be unfilled, the patrol force dwindling to 176 by 1878. A citizens' committee asked Congress to restore the two-thirds/one-third split in financing, arguing that most police work in the capital derived from duties in some way related to the national government. Policemen again petitioned the House not to reduce their pay any further, citing their recent reduction at the hands of the District and their expenses for uniforms, fire arms, and supplies as justification for at least their current salary. Despite all the protests, petitions, and arguments, neither Congress nor the District governments were as yet willing to pay the price to insure honest and effective police personnel.

Not surprisingly, in view of these conditions, the Metropolitan Police had a chronic discipline problem in the postwar period. Based upon official statistics published between 1865 and 1878, approximately twenty-one policemen were dismissed for cause each year. For a force which never exceeded 238 men during the period, the dismissal rate was high. This is especially true when it is considered that many policemen resigned under pressure and never were listed among those officially dismissed. 37

Although working under severe financial limitations, the leadership of the police department made several attempts to promote efficiency and effectiveness within the ranks. In 1866 and again in 1867 Police Superintendent Richards visited several northern and western cities to obtain ideas for the improvement of Washington's police. After his first trip he concluded that "the twelve hour tours of duty of our men is entirely too long" and undermined the health "and as a consequence the efficiency of the organization." He also determined that he was "too negligent in enforcing the rules and regulations of the Board, and that the character and reputation of our force requires more stringent action in this respect." 38 Richards' second tour prompted him to urge the adoption of a New York-type school of police instruction to help weed out the unfit before they were placed on full duty. From time to time large-scale transfers of personnel from one precinct to another were made in the apparent hope that any cor-
Testimony before the House Select Committee To Investigate the Board of Police Commissioners showed that Murtagh apparently had attempted to use the police to interfere with two congressional investigations. The first instance, in 1872, involved Murtagh's use of two policemen to shadow Charles A. Dana, a witness before a House committee investigating the management of the Navy Department. The objective of the surveillance was to discover who Dana had as a source for his attacks on the Navy Department in his paper, The New York Sun.44

The second and more serious charge against Murtagh stemmed from his attempt to influence the official conduct of a member of the House. Superintendent Richards testified that in July 1876 Murtagh approached him about entrapment of Representative Washington C. Whithorne of Tennessee, Chairman of a House committee conducting another investigation of the Navy Department. Murtagh's interest in the naval investigations apparently resulted from his friendship with the Secretary of the Navy, George M. Robeson. The plan was for the police to raid a house of prostitution while Whithorne was inside. Murtagh had heard Whithorne frequented such places, or, if he did not, a prostitute could be procured to induce him into one. In any event, Whithorne would be arrested and taken to the police station. Reporters for the National Republican would be notified of the prize catch. The reporters would go to the station, write a report, but promise to withhold it if Whithorne would moderate his anticipated report on naval affairs.45

Detectives McDevitt and Miller substantially corroborated Richards’ testimony, and the House Select Committee found no conflict in any testimony about the plan to influence a member of Congress. Murtagh admitted he had discussed an investigation of Whithorne, but insisted he had the right to order any policeman or detective to determine if anyone was involved in crime or associated with criminals. From the evidence submitted the committee concluded that Murtagh had been “unscrupulous” in his attempt to disgrace a member of Congress and “that the office of police commissioner is useless.”46

While the conclusions of the House Select Committee dealt primarily with a condemnation of Murtagh, testimony before that committee also substantiated some of Murtagh’s earlier allegations about gambling in Washington. Richards admitted that he had taken a relaxed approach toward gambling for the last several years, rationalizing that the gamblers, if arrested, were hardly ever convicted in court. Detectives McDevitt, Miller, and McElfresh obviously frequented gambling halls, although they claimed to do so only in the pursuit of evidence! Several witnesses also implicated the detectives in schemes in which the victims of robberies and gambling paid the detectives to recover their losses.

On January 23, 1877, Grant vetoed a bill abolishing the Board of Police. He said that the Board of Police should be continued at least until it had cleansed the force. However, Grant may have wanted to spare his friend Murtagh embarrassment at this time. Grant initially reappointed Murtagh to the new Board of Police, but Murtagh resigned when Richards, McDevitt, Miller, and McElfresh were to be tried before the Board.47

Based upon the testimony before the House Select Committee, the reorganized Board of Police suspended Richards, McDevitt, Miller, and McElfresh pending their trial before the Board on charges of neglect of duty in allowing gambling houses to operate. New Board President Theodore F. Gatchell also became acting Superintendent of Police. Gatchell took immediate action in an attempt to renew public confidence in the police. He ordered the police lieutenants to compile lists of gambling, prostitution, and illicit liquor houses, and put the suspects on notice that the laws would be strictly enforced. The list showed 51 houses of prostitution, 28 gambling houses, and 129 places selling liquor without a license. He found “the filthy condition” of the station houses “disgraceful” and observed that “something was wrong” with the detective corps. Gatchell’s publicity blitz was no doubt needed, for in the Senate requests were being made for special police during the electoral vote count because it was well known to all that “the police force of this city is in a state of disorder.”48

Richards, McDevitt, Miller, and McElfresh were never brought to trial. After a week’s suspension they resumed their respective duties. Two months later the Board of
Police reported that "all charges growing out of the alleged occurrences within the term of the former board are hereby dismissed." They thought that the public interest did not require punishing a few subordinates for things that had developed over several years, implying that the former Board of Police was as much to blame as anyone. Murtagh, still publishing The National Republican, labeled the Board's report "lame and impotent," a "cover-up," and "whitewashing."

The Board's report did not lay to rest the controversy surrounding the prolonged police scandal. However, the scandal had precipitated some changes in the daily operations of the force, and it was a major factor in Superintendent Richards' resignation and the abolition of the Board of Police during the following year.

The force as a whole became much more conscious of enforcing vice laws, perhaps too much so. At times most of the force would be occupied in pursuing gambling operations while other crimes continued unabated or even rose in frequency. The Board adjusted the rules governing the detectives to provide closer supervision of their activities. Several transfers in personnel were intended to break up collusion between police and criminals. Finally, a drillmaster began to drill the police in military fashion in the belief that this would improve the efficiency of the force.

Richards, having been cleared of any criminal offense, nevertheless decided to resign in January 1878. He was replaced by Thomas P. Morgan, whose qualifications for the superintendency included no police experience but a plethora of recommendations as a man of energy and judgment.

As for the Board of Police, it had been operating on borrowed time since President Grant had vetoed its abolition in the midst of the House investigation in 1877. The Board became embroiled in yet another controversy in 1878 when a citizens' petition to President Hayes alleged that Board President Gatchell was insincere, lacked discretion, was a showman, and had used his office to benefit his own insurance business. The last charge related to Gatchell's supposed approach to R. W. Tyler, an insurance agent, with an offer of the superintendency of police in return for the transfer of Tyler's business to himself. The other four commissioners also wrote Hayes, threatening to quit unless Gatchell was removed. Gatchell finally resigned, denying any wrongdoing and countercharging his colleagues with being soft on gamblers and illicit liquor dealers.

The Board of Police had dug its own grave, and Congress buried it when the commissioner form of government was made "permanent" in June 1878. Powers and functions of the Board of Police were transferred to the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia. That anyone mourned the abolition of the Board of Police was unlikely. Having been created in an attempt to eliminate political usage of the police, the Board destroyed itself when its leadership engaged in that same activity.

Superintendent Richards, gone also by 1878, seemed to be a greater loss. He had performed creditably during most of his thirteen-year tenure. His even-handed approach to local politics was commendable, and the Congressional investigation of the Board of Police showed him to be guilty of nothing more than occasional laxness in enforcing vice laws.

The morale of the force at large had to be poor by 1878. The Board had failed in its leadership role, and neither Congress nor the local taxpayers were willing to finance an effective operation. Consequently, although the composition of the force had changed during the thirteen years since the war, many of its characteristics remained the same. Policemen were underpaid, worked long hours, often in poor working conditions, and were susceptible to corruption.

Notes

2 Report of the Metropolitan Board of Police, 1865, in Report of the Secretary of the Interior. House Executive Documents. 39th Cong., 1st Sess., Ser. 1248, p. 843. Hereafter referred to as Report. followed by the date of the year in which the report was given. The Reports of the Metropolitan Board of Police are in the Reports of the Secretary of Interior (1865-1872) and the Reports of the Attorney General (1873-1877). In reference to disturbances surrounding military demobilization, see also, Report, 1866. House Executive

3Report, 1866, p. 600. Superintendent Richards reaffirmed this practice before a Congressional Committee in 1877. United States, Congress, House, Select Committee to Investigate the Board of Police Commissioners of the District of Columbia, Police Board Investigation, 44th Cong., 2d Sess., 1877, Mis. Doc. No. 40, p. 5; Star, 15, 30 June, 12, 19 Aug. 1865.

4Star, 3 Dec. 1873, 30 Jan. 1877. Only ten houses of prostitution were listed in the other seven precincts combined.


6Report, 1866, p. 599.

7Report, 1866, p. 599; U.S., Statutes at Large, XIV, 212-215; Star, 16 June 1866; See also, Report, 1867, House Executive Documents, 40th Cong., 2d Sess., Ser. 1326, p. 509.


10Star, 1 Dec. 1865.


12Elijah Acton, Stephen L. Calhoun, Edward Gannon, Hamilton W. Balinger, William H. Bueliaford, Edward Hughes, James W. Edmonston, Charles Brandenberger, John A. Crook, Thomas O. Sturgis, Personnel Files. The last seven names refer to policemen who were disfigured by a menstruating woman from whom they were detaining.


17Washington Post, 10 Dec. 1877, 1 Jan. 1878.

18Star, 3, 4, 8 Jan. 1878; Post, 8 Jan. 1878; Sylvester, District of Columbia Police, p. 69.

19Report, 1867, p. 506; Star, 4, 10 June 1867; Green, Washington, 1800-1878, p. 301; Green, Secret City, p. 81; Whyte, Uncivil War, pp. 59-62.

20Chronicle, 28 June 1868; See also, Chronicle, 9, 10, 12, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27 June 1868.

21Green, Washington, 1800-1878, pp. 333-38; Whyte, Uncivil War, pp. 90-148; Green, Secret City, p. 104; Star, 30 June 1871; Statutes at Large, XVI, 419-29.

22Charles C. Tillman, Calvin C. Caruthers, Personnel Files; Star, 31 Oct. 1871, 20 Aug. 1874; Chronicle, 1, 21 Oct. 1869. As might have been expected, there were some internal resistance to integration of the force. For example, Private Samuel H. Ellis was dismissed from the force in October 1869 for refusing to do duty with a colored officer.

23Calvin C. Caruthers, David E. Chase, Personnel Files.

24Report, 1871, p. 1207; Statutes at Large, XIV, 456-57; Star, 21 June 1867.

25Report, 1871, pp. 1207-08; 1867, p. 507; 1875, pp. 64-65; James Fitzpatrick, Personnel Files; Star, 6 Oct. 1865, 26 Nov. 1869.

26Brown, Washington: A Not Too Serious History, pp. 443-44; Post, 8 Mar. 1878.

27Post, 8, 15 Mar. 1878. A woman had applied for special police powers in the area of her Capitol Hill home in 1875; her application was refused. Three police matrons were appointed to the force in 1889, and women became regular officers in Washington in 1918. New York appointed matrons in 1891, and women served as members of that force by 1899. See Sylvester, D.C. Police, p. 64; Young and Humphries, The Metropolitan Police Department, p. 64; Howard V. Covell (compiler), A Brief History of the Metropolitan Police Department (Washington: Metropolitan Police Department, 1946), p. 6; Richardson, The New York Police, p. 171.

28Report, 1865, p. 843; 1875, p. 65; 1876, p. 924; 1871, p. 1209; 1874, p. 69; 1876, p. 42; 1878, p. 199. Population in the District increased from 126,990 in 1867 to 177,624 in 1880. See Green, Washington, 1800-1878, pp. 306.

29Report, 1874, pp. 69-70; 1868, p. 880; 1875, pp. 65-66; 1876, pp. 48-49; 1878, p. 200; Star, 8 Sept. 1865, 20 Aug. 1874, 31 Dec. 1877; Post, 1, 8 Jan., 6 Feb. 1878. In New York the police-to-people ratio was 1 to 500 in 1876. See Richardson, New York Police, p. 169.

30Payroll Book, 1861-1866, Metropolitan Police Department, Record Group 351, Records of the Government of the District of Columbia, National Archives; Report, 1876, p. 42; Star, 22 Dec. 1877.

31Statutes at Large, 212-15; Payroll Book, July, 1866; pp. 600-01. This raise brought pay for the Washington police in line with what other cities were paying. Baltimore ($3 per day), Memphis ($3 per day), St. Louis ($900 per year), Philadelphia ($950 per year), New Orleans ($1,000 per year), Cincinnati ($1,095 per year),
Boston ($1.095 per year), and New York ($1.200 per year). See Star. June 1878.

32Star. 8 Nov. 1871, 12 Dec. 1868.
33Report, 1876, pp. 42-43; Star, 11, 12, 19 July 1876. The District had annually been paying $102,635 for salaries and $25,000 for upkeep of stations. In effect, total appropriations for police were cut from $332,905 to $300,000.
34Star. 16 Mar. 1874. 2 Mar., 20 Apr. 1877.
35Report, 1874, pp. 70-73; 1875, p. 68; 1876, pp. 49-50; Star, 28 Mar. 1877. Several policemen were dismissed for "inefficiency, due to ill health" rather than retained on the force. See Chronicle, 4 Mar., 21 Apr. 1870.
36Report. 1874, pp. 70-71; 1875, p. 68; 1876, pp. 49-50; 1878, p. 200. Boston had similar problems of retaining the unfit on the rolls, whereas New York had a pension fund in operation by the 1870's. See Lane, Policing the City, pp. 182-83, and Richardson, New York Police, pp. 173-75.
37Report. 1866, p. 845; 1866, p. 603; 1867, p. 505; 1868, p. 871; 1869, p. 1122; 1870, p. 925; 1871, p. 1209; 1874, pp. 71-72; 1875, p. 68; 1876, p. 51; James W. Edmondston, John H. Murphy, Personnel Files Chronicle. 4 Sept., 1 Oct. 1869; Star, 16, June 1865. James F. Richardson's history of the New York police does not cite the exact number of policemen terminated in that city. However, he does conclude that "discipline tended to be faithfully and capriciously administered" in New York, and consequently a large number of unfit policemen remained on duty. See Richardson, New York Police, pp. 60, 69, 81, 158, 193, 201-04, 260-61, 274, 277, 282.
38Star. 2 Nov. 1866; Chronicle. 2 Nov. 1866.
39Star. 1 Dec. 1865.
40National Republican (Washington), 14-16, 18, 20, 23 Dec. 1876. Hereafter referred to as N. R. Murtagh had been a member of the Board of Police since 1865, serving as Treasurer (1866-1869) and President (1870-1877).
41Star, 29, 30 Dec. 1876, 1, 3, 4 Jan. 1877; N. R., 29, 30 Dec. 1876, 1, 2, 4 Jan. 1877. The Chronicle, 9 July 1869, indicated that at that time the Board endorsed vigorous actions against gambling.
42N. R., 6, 8 Jan. 1877; Police Board Investigation, p. 1.
43Star. 8, Jan. 1877; N. R. 8 Jan. 1877; Police Board Investigation, p. 1.
45Select Committee, Police Department, pp. 2-3; Police Board Investigation, pp. 1-23, 34-36, 53-55, 93-98, 105-08, 118-24.
46Select Committee. Police Department, p. 4. The committee's final statement on the issue said Murtagh was "unworthy to hold any office under the Government."
47U.S., Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 2d Sess., 1877, V, Part 2, 1286; Star, 10-12, 16, 18, 19, 26, 27, 29 Jan. 1877; N. R., 24, 27, 31 Jan. 1877.
48Star, 29, 30, 31 Jan., 1 Feb. 1877; Record. 44th Cong., 2d Sess., 1877, V, Part 2, 1288.
49Record, 45th Cong., 2d Sess., VII, Part 4, 3605; Statutes at Large, XX, 102-08; Star, 22 Mar., 10 June 1878; Post, 10 June 1878; Sylvester, D. C. Police, pp. 69-70; Green, Secret City, pp. 116-17; Proctor, Washington, pp. 573-74; Green, Washington, 1800-1878. p. 395.
CHAPTER SIX

Years of Transition, 1878-1886

ALTHOUGH Congress had stripped Washington of meaningful local government in the Organic Law of 1878, Washingtonians were quietly optimistic about the future. The city's financial solvency seemed assured by Congress' pledge to share expenses equally. Lack of local control over the three presidentially-appointed commissioners was outweighed on many people's scales by the guarantee against a government partly controlled by black voters and politicians. Even black leaders were not outwardly upset about the new scheme; they hoped that the President, Congress, and the federal courts would protect their civil rights.

The Washington police had some reason to share hopeful expectations with the rest of society. A stable Superintendent of Police, now answerable to the D.C. Commissioners instead of an independent Board of Police, might restore public confidence. Unfortunately, however, frequent turnover of Superintendents impeded police reform and slowed the transition to a more effective and efficient operation.

Thomas P. Morgan, who became Superintendent of Police on February 2, 1878, after A.C. Richards resigned, took over the management and control of the force when the powers of the Board of Police Commissioners expired on July 1, 1878. Morgan was conspicuously lacking in police experience, but his prior service in city government and his business experience had put him in good stead with influential members of the community.1

Morgan served as chief of police only until President Hayes named him a Commissioner of the District of Columbia in November 1879. During his brief tenure, he did alter the deployment of the 238-man force. An advocate of greater mobility, Morgan transferred sixteen privates from foot patrol to mounted, bringing the total mounted force up to fifty-two men.2 Morgan also resolved on a thorough investigation of the condition of the force. He ordered the lieutenants to make a written report on the fitness (mental, moral, physical, and professional) of the personnel. Any individual not considered efficient was to be brought before the Trial Board and dealt with individually. There is no record that these reports were completed before Morgan resigned to accept nomination to the D.C. Board of Commissioners.3

Morgan was the only one of the four police chiefs who resigned between 1879 and 1886 to leave office unscathed. His three immediate successors, William G. Brock, William McE. Dye, and Samuel H. Walker, all resigned under a cloud of scandal and/or controversy.

* * * * *

William G. Brock, Moran's successor, was the first Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police who had risen up from its ranks. He was one of the original members of the force, giving him eighteen years' police experience. Familiarity with the operation of the force no doubt eased his assumption of command.4 However, his tenure in office was marred by a presidential assassination and a major scandal in the detective bureau.

The shooting of President James A. Garfield at Washington's Baltimore and Potomac Railroad depot on July 2, 1881, once again focused national attention on the unique problems of policing the capital city. During Garfield's Inauguration, as in every similar ceremony since the Jacksonian era, the Washington police had taken
special precautions to handle the extraordinary number of thieves and pickpockets drawn to the city by the festivities. Some stayed in the city, seeking jobs or perhaps bent on crime. One of these individuals, Charles Guiteau, fatally wounded the President.5

A Washington policeman, Private Patrick Kearney, detailed to duty at the railroad depot, seized Guiteau as he fled. Kearney, with assistance, took Guiteau to police headquarters. Meanwhile, the police ambulance took Garfield to the White House. After hovering near death for over two months, Garfield died on September 19, 1881.

Until Guiteau's hanging on June 30, 1882, the Washington police were engaged in investigating the shooting and providing security for the assassin. Detectives found no evidence of a conspiracy in the assassination although they pursued numerous anonymous tips. An “army of cranks” descended on the city, promising to do everything from “curing” the President to killing his assassin. In the end, however, heavy security by the Washington police at the jail and during Guiteau's trips to court enabled the judicial process, rather than lynch law, to dispense with the assassin.6

Shortly after the Guiteau affair was settled, scandals in the detective branch of the Metropolitan Police came to the surface. The first instance concerned detective George O. Miller's involvement in the investigation of the star route bribery cases in the postal service.7 U.S. Attorney General Benjamin H. Brewster asked the D.C. Commissioners to remove Miller for not reporting to his superiors his knowledge of an attempt to bribe one of the jurors in the star route trials. The Commissioners tried Miller, found him guilty, and ordered his dismissal from the force.

A more widespread and more damaging scandal within the detective bureau was breaking at the time Miller's case was being disposed of. On November 25, 1882, the New York Sun printed a story which linked the detective force with “the uninterrupted success” of gambling operations in Washington.8 Two weeks later William P. Wood, a private detective formerly associated with the U.S. Secret Service, charged that “certain detectives divided spoils with the thieves” in a number of burglaries and bank robberies.

Since neither the D.C. Commissioners nor the Superintendent of Police seemed anxious to investigate these rather serious charges, a citizens' committee took on the task. Members of the committee interviewed several known thieves who admitted paying off Detectives Miller, James A. McDevitt, and George W. McElfresh for protection. Citizen complaints about detective operations began to pour in, most of them testifying that stolen property was recovered only after payment to the thieves with the detectives acting as conduits for the exchange.9

With police morale and public confidence diminishing once again, the D.C. Commissioners finally acted. They took up their own investigation in late December 1882 and almost immediately ordered the suspension of detectives McDevitt and McElfresh. The detectives insisted upon a Trial Board hearing, but U.S. Attorney General Brewster ruled that the D.C. Commissioners had full power to remove police officers independent of any internal Trial Board findings.

As evidence which linked detectives with gamblers and thieves accumulated, the D.C. Commissioners recommended to Congress that the detective force be abolished. Congress, acting with unaccustomed speed, complied with the Commissioners' request by the end of January 1883.

The old detective force was legislated out of office, and provisions were made for detailing six patrolmen to serve special duty as detectives. In this way, transfers from patrolman to detective and demotions from detective to patrolman could serve as a disciplinary procedure.10

During the next year, ex-detectives Miller, McElfresh, McDevitt, Joseph Acton, and U.W. Coomes were all tried and acquitted in criminal court. The presiding judge in the cases did the defendants a favor by discounting the testimony of criminals and suspects because they had been given immunity.11

The D.C. Commissioners asked Superintendent Brock to resign in March 1883. Investigations of Brock had not revealed any personal dishonesty, but by innuendo and implication he had been linked to the scandal. The Commissioners wanted “a more efficient administrator,” and thought Brock’s “long association with the force would hinder reorganization plans.” Admitting he may have been “too easy” in disciplining
his friends on the force, but asserting his innocence regarding the scandal, Brock complied with the Commissioners' request.

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To replace Brock, the Commissioners named William McEntire Dye, a man who had considerable military administrative experience but no previous connection with any police force. Dye was fifty-one years old, a graduate of West Point in 1853, a Civil War veteran, and most recently an examiner in the pension bureau of the War Department.12

Upon taking command, Dye asked his men to conduct themselves in such a manner as to regain public confidence. He requested resignations from some of the older officers on the force, and ordered a number of transfers. As a measure of his initial success, Dye reported in September 1883 that during the first three months of his administration crime, especially burglaries, had diminished significantly. He credited this trend to "the new life, the zeal and honesty, of the men recently introduced into the force and into important positions there," and to their refusal to compromise "with the vampires who would destroy society itself."13

For the next two and one-half years there was relatively little public criticism of Dye's police leadership or talk about corruption in the department. To accommodate the press, Dye opened some previously sealed records and for the first time admitted a reporter to proceedings of the police trial board. In an attempt to get maximum efficiency out of an undermanned force, the Superintendent experimented with a police telephone system. The call boxes could be used to summon policemen to quell a disturbance or the patrol wagon to convey prisoners quickly to the station. By requiring the patrolmen to report hourly, a check on the discipline of the force was also provided. Washington was the fourth American city to introduce a police telephone system.14

Suddenly, on June 26, 1886, the D.C. Commissioners asked Dye to resign. By way of explanation, Commissioner Samuel E. Wheatley merely said that "we want to improve the police department, to make it more effective and active." No charges were filed against Dye, although the Commissioners reportedly had gathered "a large amount of evidence which is not to the credit of the police force, detectives included. . . ." Other reports characterized Dye as "too easy-going for the office" and cited the need for "an active, stirring man." Still others thought the main reason for Dye's dismissal was simply that he was not a local boy and had never been favorably received by the local citizens.15

Dye refused to turn in his resignation, protesting that that the Commissioners were "partially moved in this matter by the bad elements of the society in the District." Faced with a challenge to their authority, the Commissioners ordered Dye removed from the superintendency and named Samuel H. Walker to that position.16

Samuel H. Walker was forty-two years old, a former student at Columbian College, a real estate broker, owning "considerable property on Capitol Hill," and a lifelong resident of the District. He was not particularly qualified for the job, other than having funded a petition campaign to ask Congress to increase police pay. More importantly, he had been a friend of Commissioner Wheatley since boyhood.

Walker began still another reorganization of the force. Like his predecessors, the new chief ordered a batch of transfers and reassignments. He made a special attempt to detail the older officers to the "soft positions, such as at the depots and other points where officers are stationed with little to do." A temperance man, Walker warned the personnel that he would enforce the rules prohibiting drinking while on duty. His naivete about this particular problem was shown when he later said he "was not prepared to find there were any officers on the force disposed to violate" that regulation. Finally, Walker had the audacity to issue "an order prohibiting card playing in the police station on Sunday." Recalling his first few months in office years later, Walker said he "found much dissatisfaction in the department and at once began putting things in order, but soon . . . found this to be a gigantic undertaking."17

Despite what appeared to be the dawn of a new reform era in police administration, Walker was in so much trouble by November 1886 that he too had to resign. Walker's problems began when, during a meeting with his lieutenants, he suggested that if any of
the officers had any influence with members of Congress they should use it to support congressional legislation to increase the force. Lieutenant Richard A. Arnold told Walker that "one prominent member of Congress could be found twice a week at a house of ill-fame." Another lieutenant remarked that congressmen often called upon them not to report their drunkenness. Walker said he was not in favor of such a spy system. Nevertheless, after the meeting the police grapevine circulated the idea of surveillance all about town, even into the White House.

President Grover Cleveland wrote the D.C. Commissioners regarding the matter, and they took up an investigation. Walker, meanwhile, had persuaded the lieutenants to sign a letter, later disavowed by Lieutenant Arnold and his friend Lieutenant John F. Kelly, to the effect that Walker had never asked them to spy on congressmen. When rumors continued, Walker formally charged Arnold with conduct unbecoming an officer, specifically for circulating, "maliciously," false statements.

Arnold's trial confirmed most of the story that had already been whispered about on the streets of Washington. The trial also verified Arnold's motives for leaking the story in the first place. He expected to be named Superintendent if Walker resigned due to pressure resulting from the scandal. Furthermore, ex-detective James McDevitt, who had been fired in 1883, was anxious for Walker's ouster. McDevitt was a good friend of Arnold and expected to be restored to the force if Arnold became chief. McDevitt had written an anonymous letter to Walker pointing out the proclivities of congressmen to "play poker and drink whiskey and run after women" and urged a raid on the Metropolitan Club to "catch all of the District Commissioners with their friends around the poker table." At the same time McDevitt wrote the Commissioners, telling them "that the new Chief of Police is making an ass of himself" by tailing congressmen.

The D.C. Commissioners, after considering the testimony in Arnold's trial, issued a report on the whole affair on November 24, 1886. They found that the evidence was not sufficient to sustain any specific charge against Lieutenant Arnold, "but in this case there has been disclosed a condition of affairs in the Police Department that demands serious attention and prompt application of remedial measures." They did condemn Walker's "suggestion, however innocently intended, of personal intervention of the police in matters of legislation." Arnold stood convicted of misrepresenting the Superintendent to other members of the force in a matter that he knew "could only result in disaster and disgrace." Therefore, the Commissioners ordered that Walker's resignation be accepted and that Arnold be dismissed "for gross indiscretion, false allegations against public men and false statements to the Commissioners." Other principals in the case were also punished: Lt. John F. Kelly was reprimanded and suspended without pay for three months; Sergeant Bartholomew Diggins was reprimanded and reduced to the ranks for three months. Private William Z. Edelin was dismissed "for false swearing in this trial and for disseminating scandal."

None of those punished thought the Commissioners' decision was fair, but the clean sweep of the principals involved was a necessary first step in the restoration of public confidence in the police force. The dismissals also successfully mollified Congress, as talk of a congressional investigation diminished. Some reports indicated that certain congressmen did not want an investigation anyway, for then it would become even more well known that some of them did indeed frequent houses of prostitution in the nation's capital.

It was two weeks before the Commissioners selected a new Major and Superintendent for the Metropolitan Police Department. Prudence dictated that the Commissioners be judicious in their choice, for Washington could ill afford another weak police chief. Four chiefs in eight years was too much of a turnover. Fortunately, the man finally selected to head the Metropolitan Police, William G. Moore, would serve twelve years. He brought integrity back to the police administration, furthered some police reform, regained public confidence, and dispelled much of the demoralization that gripped the force in late 1886.

* * * * *

The demoralization of the force in the 1880's was not entirely due to the police chiefs.
Problems which had plagued the Washington police since 1800 continued in the 1878-1886 period. Lack of adequate numbers, an obsolete restriction on appointments, low pay, and poor working conditions still characterized the policing situation in the capital.

The growth of the police department hardly kept pace with the growth in population during the 1878-1886 period. In 1867, when Congress authorized a 238-man police force, the District's population was 126,990. In 1885, when the force was composed of 267 men, the population was over 204,000. Comparative data clearly illustrate the District's inferior position regarding police-to-population and police-to-land area ratios in 1886:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of people to one policeman on duty</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Average number of policemen per square mile patrolling at any one time</th>
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<tr>
<td>2700</td>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2400</td>
<td>Saint Louis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2142</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>1842</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Police authorities tried to goad Congress into increasing the force by emphasizing that the capital city should be first rather than last in police personnel. "The same pride should exist for a permanent and perfect police organization at Washington as is manifested for lofty and substantial buildings, extensive public grounds, and elegant terraces, statues, and libraries."

No standard of perfection could be reached when manpower was so short, especially when it is remembered that the Washington police force was expected to provide security for various functions of the federal government. Permanent details to the Executive Mansion and numerous special details to public receptions for government officials and foreign representatives constantly sapped police strength. One-tenth of the force was usually on special assignment.

The understaffed force was thus further reduced in its ability to meet the policing needs of the city which was passing through a very significant phase of development at this time. To take one example, the large number of blacks drawn to the city during and after the Civil War posed special challenges for the Washington police.

Whites were quick to blame blacks for most of the crime in Washington and quick to ask Congress for more police to protect them from outrages allegedly committed by some black citizens. In early 1880, for example, the attempted lynching of a black accused of raping a white woman culminated a winter of deep racial tension. The police averted the lynching, but white citizens were indignant. They set up citizens' patrols to protect whites and possibly punish blacks. White citizens' meetings demanded police protection from Congress, citing the vast area to be patrolled and too few policemen to do an adequate job. One group also berated some of the special detail work of the police, saying "the police should be protecting people rather than opening doors of carriages of foreign ministers."

The police force itself became embroiled in the racial controversy five years later. Blacks had been complaining with good reason for several years about being passed over for appointments to the force. Furthermore, charges of police brutality toward blacks became commonplace in the summer of 1885. When a white Washington policeman shot and killed a black who was allegedly resisting arrest, the matter came to a head. After a black "indignation meeting," police reported that "every colored man resists when officers make an arrest." Police attitudes hardened, and they thought that "strong measures should be adopted" to prevent interference with their duty. The majority of Washingtonians and the temper of the times supported the police. Conse-
quently, police relations with the black community deteriorated, just as the status of blacks in Washington and the nation as a whole deteriorated in the latter stages of the nineteenth century.26

* * * * *

Another frustrating barrier to police effectiveness was the requirement that appointees to the Metropolitan Police must be honorably discharged from the United States Army or Navy. This proviso was first tacked on to an appropriations bill in 1867 in an obvious attempt to give favor to Union veterans after the Civil War.27 By the 1880's, the army/navy requirement was under attack by virtually everyone concerned with the Washington police. The D.C. Commissioners and Superintendents of Police repeatedly asked Congress to repeal the “obnoxious” law. Policemen themselves denounced the clause as contributing to the weakness of the force.

The failure of the petitions advocating the repeal of the army/navy requirement indicated how Congress could ignore the wishes of the local populace. For example, when a bill proposing to increase the police force and to remove the army/navy clause was introduced in the House in 1880, Representative Omar D. Conger denounced it as “an “attack” on Union soldiers. Senators Henry M. Teller and Edward H. Rollins supported the army/navy provision on the grounds that military training was valuable experience for police work. Congress’ only concession in the 1878-1886 period was an allowance in 1883 that no more than six privates could be appointed from among citizens who had not served in the U.S. Army or Navy.28

Salaries also continued to be an irritant adversely affecting police morale. When the Organic Law of 1878 abolished the Board of Police and made the D.C. Commissioners the ultimate supervisory body over the police, the policemen hoped their financial status might improve. They had not received a raise since 1866, and they had often experienced difficulty in obtaining their checks on time.

Shortly after the D.C. Commissioners assumed power, they shocked policemen by actually reducing police pay in order to stay within the the $300,000 total police expense limit imposed by Congress.29 Except for some minor adjustments upward for lieutenants in 1883, the pay scale remained fixed through 1886. In fact, lieutenants were the only members of the force who received a pay raise in the twenty years following the end of the war. However, pay for the Washington police was not too far out of line with that received in other cities:30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Chief</th>
<th>Assistant</th>
<th>Captains</th>
<th>Lieut's.</th>
<th>Detectives</th>
<th>Sergeants</th>
<th>Patrolmen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D.C.</td>
<td>$2600</td>
<td>$1800</td>
<td>$1320</td>
<td>$1320</td>
<td>$1140</td>
<td>$900</td>
<td>$1080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
<td>1102</td>
<td></td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>2150</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>840</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>2750</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whatever the comparative situation, $75 per month to the new recruit was not going to attract the highest quality of personnel.

One financial gain for Washington policemen was the establishment of a pension fund in 1885. Prior to that year, the police authorities had made an annual appeal to Congress: “It seems ... that not only justice but public policy requires that something more inspiring than the almshouse be held out as the reward for the ‘faithful servant’.”31

Many families of deceased, injured, or old policemen suffered because of no pension income. In 1879 twenty families of policemen who died in service were reported to be “in very needy circumstances in this city.” The only assistance they received was about $200 paid at the time of death from a “mutual assurance organization” in existence among the men. Philip Thompson’s case revealed the plight of the injured cop. Thomp-
son, one of the first black members on the force, was severed from the force in 1883 without a pension despite the fact that the reason for his discharge was an eye injury received in the line of duty. 32

In 1885 the pension fund began to offer financial help to survivors of deceased members of the force, as well as disabled and old policemen. Money for the fund was accumulated from fines on officers, rewards, sale of lost or unclaimed property, and a $1 per month deduction from the policeman's salaries. Any policeman with fifteen years' service was eligible for up to $50 per month pension if so certified by the police surgeon. Thoroughly disabled policemen with less than fifteen years' experience and widows or orphaned children could also get relief. By 1887 nine policemen had taken advantage of the pension fund.

Another problem carried over from previous years which had contributed to demoralization and inefficiency was the deplorable condition of the station houses. Policemen spent a great deal of time at the stations. (In 1886 policemen spent fourteen hours per day on duty, nine on patrol and five on reserve at the station.) Until the mid-1880's this time was seldom pleasant. Ventilation and drainage were often inferior, causing foul odors to emanate from the cells of prisoners directly below the policemen's sleeping quarters. This could lead to "sickness and consequent loss of service in a force so unable to bear it, in which absence from duty of even one man is seriously felt." 33

Three new stations constructed in 1882-1883 brought some relief at last. However, at least three other precinct stations badly needed replacement, one of them even being "formally condemned by both the police surgeons and the building inspector." 34 In accommodations, as in personnel increases, pay, and pensions, the wherewithal to provide effective and efficient policing for the nation's capital was still only grudgingly, if at all, obtained.

* * * * *

The discipline of the force naturally was affected by the rapid turnover in chiefs and the nagging problems associated with working conditions. When each new chief came in, he said he was determined to clean up the force. The superintendents had difficulty meeting that objective in part because of the fact that most of them were forced out of office after a relatively brief tenure. Nevertheless, they usually shook up the personnel by forcing transfers, resignations, and, occasionally, dismissals.

The rate of dismissals during the 1878-1886 time span showed a marked decline when compared to the Reconstruction period. During the 1865-1878 period, an average of twenty-one policemen were terminated each year, whereas dismissals averaged only nine per year between 1878 and 1886. 35

There are several possible explanations for the decline in the dismissal rate. Ideally, it could be hoped that more qualified personnel was being selected. It is more likely that fewer new appointments simply lessened the opportunities to appoint weak policemen and that many of the inefficient had already been weeded out. There are also indications that the rules and regulations were not enforced as strictly as they had been under the Board of Police and certainly not as severely as the chiefs of police alleged. A sampling of personnel files reveals that policemen who deserved firing sometimes received special treatment from superiors. For example, Superintendent Dye twice overruled recommendations of the Trial Board that patrolman George E. Sullivan be dismissed, despite the fact Sullivan's commanding officer reported that he was "indolent and careless and ... too fond of Liquor to make an Efficient Police Officer." Being "a Sterling Republican" saved policeman William H. Mickle, while John Middleton kept his job primarily because he was "especially deserving of recognition because of his service to his country as a soldier during the late war." 36

The case of Junius B. Slack had more sensational implications and merits retelling in more detail. Slack became a policeman in 1880 despite a physical deformity ("mutilation of nose") and admission of criminal activity ("Have been before the Pol. Ct. 4 or 5 times: drunk & disorderly"). In his first year of service he was found guilty by the Trial Board of mercilessly beating one William H. Maroney, a seventy-year-old crippled man who had asked for lodging at the seventh precinct station house. He was only fined
and reprimanded, however, and continued to terrorize citizens in East Washington and fellow police officers for several more years. In 1882 he was convicted of "boisterous and rude" behavior toward a superior officer and fined again. During the next two years citizens petitioned the Commissioners to terminate Slack, accusing him of mischief, gambling, trespassing, neglect of duty, brutality, and generally being "one of the greatest ruffians in the district, associating with none but the lowest characters." Yet Slack was never fired. Why? Although never proven, many citizens believed that D.C. Commissioner Thomas P. Morgan, an ex-police chief, "has had Slack's sister for his mistress for many years and it was on her account that Mr. Morgan appointed him on the force although he could not pass a surgical examination." Another report maintained that Slack bragged "that as long as Morgan was a Commissioner, he could do as he pleased." It is reasonable to conclude that Slack must have had protection from someone in authority, and Morgan was in a position to give him that assistance. That a policeman like Slack was able to remain on the job damaged the reputation and standing of the force as a whole.

Of those officers who were dismissed, the single most frequent cause was still intoxication. Although older policemen reported that there was not as much drinking on the force as during the Reconstruction period, the pathetic image of the drunken patrolman was still seen too often on the streets of Washington. If a policeman was caught drinking or intoxicated on duty he was usually fired, but sometimes the Commissioners would be lenient and simply fine and reprimand the inebriates.

Other grounds for termination were usually classified under "conduct unbecoming an officer" or "gross neglect of duty." These classifications encompassed a multitude of sins. However, as noted earlier, the rate of dismissals was down sharply from previous years, and there was some reason to hope that more and more policemen were conducting themselves in a manner deserving of public trust and respect.

* * * * *

On September 11, 1886, the Metropolitan Police Department celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Nine of the original members of the force still remained on active duty. It is not unlikely that these nine gathered to reflect upon their police experiences in the past quarter century. The next few weeks would expose a scandal involving superintendent Walker that would bring up memories of the detective scandal of 1882-1883 and Police Commissioner William J. Murtagh's similar troubles in 1877-1878. Yet the nine veterans could remember an even worse police situation, that being the period immediately prior to the creation of the M.P.D., when partisan use of the police had brought the force into disrepute and had necessitated a fundamental reorganization. They must have wondered if scandal in police administration would ever end.

Anniversaries are also a time to look forward. Unlike their older colleagues who had left the force prior to the mid-1880's, the nine twenty-five-year men could anticipate a pension to assist them through their retirement years. They may also have been enthusiastic about the possibilities new technology offered. The telephone system promised greater mobility and increased efficiency. Finally, they could see that fewer of their fellow policemen were conducting themselves in a manner that brought personal as well as occupational disgrace. Perhaps the last eight years had been a transitional period leading to improved policing in the capital.

Notes

1General Orders, Fourth Precinct, 1877-1884, p. 19, Metropolitan Police Department, Record Group 351, Records of the Government of the District of Columbia, National Archives; Post, 1 Dec. 1879; Star, 1 Dec. 1879; Sylvester, District of Columbia Police, p. 77; Young and Humphries, The Metropolitan Police Department, p. 60. Technically, the Commissioners of the District of Columbia had ultimate authority over the police, although in practice they usually followed the recommendations of the Superintendent.

2Post, 14, 20 Nov. 1878; Report of the Major of Police, 1879, in Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1879, pp. 322-23. Record Group 351, Records of the Government of the District of Columbia, National Archives. All of the annual reports of the Major of Police are in the annual reports of the D.C. Commissioners during the period 1878-1886. Hereafter these reports will be referred to as Report, followed by the date of the year in which the report was given.
Post 6 Oct., 1 Dec. 1879; Star, 1 Dec. 1879. The Trial Board was a three-man panel which acted as the internal disciplining body for the force.

4Star, 1 Dec. 1879; Post, 1 Dec. 1879; 30 Jan. 1880; Sylvester, D.C. Police, p. 78; Young and Humphries, Metropolitan Police, p. 62. Brock continued Morgan's emphasis on a mounted force, citing the benefits of better patrol of outlying beats, fire protection, and crowd control. See Report, 1880, p. 140; Star, 5 Mar. 1880.

5Post, 23 May, 3 July 1881; Star, 2 July 1881; Green, Washington, p. 38; Sylvester, D.C. Police, p. 81.

6Star, 2-9 July 1881; Post, 3-6, 8, 15 July, 12 Sept., 7, 15 Oct. 1881, 1 July 1882; Sylvester, D.C. Police, pp. 81-84.

The street route cases involved a conspiracy by post office officials to defraud the government by approving high payments for useless or fictitious postal routes where mail was carried by private contractors. Of the principals involved were heavy contributors to the Garfield campaign. President Arthur ordered prosecution, but the jury verdict was "not guilty as indicted." See Mathew Josephson, The Politicos (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1938) pp. 323-25; also George O. Miller, Personnel Files.


8Post, 7, 12, 13, 23 Dec. 1882, Star, 29 Nov., 2, 7, 8, 12-16, 20, 22 Dec. 1882.

9Star, 9, 22, 23 Jan. 1883; Post, 23, 30 Jan., 13 Mar. 1883; U.S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 2d Sess., 1883, XIV, Part 2, 1309-10. See also, George O. Miller, George W. McElfresh, and James McDevitt, Personnel Files.

10Post, 14, 27, 28 Feb., 4, 13, 14 Mar. 1883; Star, 13, 17, 19, 20, 27, 28 Feb., 1-3, 5, 13, 14 Mar. 1883; National Republican (Washington), 13 Feb. 1883. Hereafter referred to as N.R.

11William McEntire Dye, Personnel Files; Star, 23 Mar. 1883; Post, 23 Mar. 1883; Sylvester, D.C. Police, p. 92; Young and Humphries, Metropolitan Police, p. 62.

12Report, 1883, pp. 118-19; Post, 8 Sept. 1883.

13Report, 1883, pp. 108-9; 1884, pp. 67-69; 1885, pp. 73-74; Post, 24 July 1883. The telephone system was tried successfully in the fifth precinct in 1883 and expanded to the seventh precinct in 1885. Chicago, St. Louis, and Columbus, Ohio, had similar systems in operation. New York and Boston had not yet adopted the police telephones. See Richardon, The New York Police, p. 170; Lane, Policing the City, pp. 203-64.

14Post, 29, 30 June, 2 July 1886; Star, 28, 30 June, 1 July 1886.

15Star, 30 June, 1 July 1886; Post, 29, June, 2 July 1886. An interview with Walker concerning his assumption of command is in the Star, 13 Sept. 1931.

16Star, 13 Sept. 1931.

17Richard A. Arnold, Personnel Files. This file contains statements made by principles in the Walker Arnold scandal and the report of the D.C. Commissioners on the matter. For contemporary newspaper accounts see the following: Post, 9, 11, 13-15 Nov. 1886; Star, 9,11, 13, 15 Nov. 1886.

18Richard A. Arnold, Personnel Files; Post, 25 Nov. 1886; Star, 24 Nov. 1886; See also, Star, 13 Sept. 1931, 9 Nov. 1941, Green, Washington, p. 38; Sylvester, D.C. Police, p. 108; Young and Humphries, Metropolitan Police, p. 64.

19Star, 3, 8, 9 Dec. 1886; Post, 9, 10, 12 Dec. 1886. Moore was a native Washingtonian, fifty-two years old, affiliated with the National Metropolitan Bank, and prominent in D.C. military organizations. He had no prior police experience. One woman, Mrs. Charlotte Smith, applied for the office.

20Report, 1886, p. 304; See also Reports, 1878, pp. 199-200; 1879, p. 320; 1880, p. 138; 1881, p. 100; 1882, p. 98; 1883, pp. 108-9; 1884, pp. 67-68; 1885, p. 65; Post, 23 Jan. 1883; Star, 28 Feb. 1880.

21Report, 1886, p. 304. See also, Post, 29 Nov. 1884.

22Green, Washington, p. 69. Blacks comprised about one-third of Washington's population during the last forty years of the nineteenth century.

23Post, 21 July, 23 Dec. 1879, 2 Mar. 1880; Star, 28 Feb., 1, 2 Mar. 1880. Police statistics for the period 1878-1885 classified arrests by race. The lowest percentage of blacks among those arrested was 33 per cent in 1879, the highest was 45 per cent in 1882. See Report, 1879, p. 326, 1880, p. 147, 1881, p. 108; 1882, p. 105; 1883, p. 114; 1884, p. 79; 1885, p. 70.

24Post, 17 Sept. 1879; Green, Washington, pp. 108-25; Green, The Secret City, pp. 128-47. In 1879, only one of the previous fifty appointments to the force was black. Several blacks who had been named during Reconstruction continued to serve on the force. See Post, 20 Nov. 1878, 23 June 1879, 29 Dec. 1880, 28 July 1883, 8 Aug. 1885; and Calvin C. Caruthers, Thomas J. Clark, Personnel Files.

25Green, Washington, pp. 108-25; Green, Secret City, pp. 128-47. One example of "coarse and insolent" behavior toward blacks by a white policeman was found in a random sampling of the Personnel Files. Policeman Richard L. Dean was found guilty of vulgar treatment of a black woman. (She testified that "he grabbed me by my privates... and said my (censored) was stiff enough for tooth picks." The woman was even treated for injury, but Dean was not fired despite a guilty verdict and heavy pressure from the black community.

26U.S. Congress, Senate, Appointment of Metropolitan Police, 46th Cong., 2d Sess., 1880, Mis. Doc. No. 47, pp. 10-12. William A. Cook, attorney for the Board of Police in the 1870's ruled in 1870 that the 1867 proviso applied only to appointments made in the fiscal year included in the appropriations bill. In 1876 he ruled that since its inclusion in the Revised Statutes (in 1874) the provision applied to all appointments made thereafter.


28Report, 1878, pp. 11-12, 203; Post, 28 June. 8, 26, 29 July. 3, 5 Sept. 1878. Detectives were cut $25 per month (reducing their salary to $110 per month). Lieutenants $5 per month (to $100), Sergeants $2.50 per month (to $95), and Privates were cut between $2 per month and $20 per month, depending upon their
Conclusion

WASHINGTON, like other American cities, was not well policed throughout most of the nineteenth century. The police force was too often used for political purposes and was staffed with weak personnel. Unlike its counterparts in other cities, the Washington police force was tied closely to the national government. This relationship was seldom beneficial.

Special duties devolved upon the Washington police because of the presence of the federal government, but Congress was consistently unwilling to support an adequate and effective force. As the capital city, Washington should have been a showplace for correct city management and effective policing. It was neither well managed nor well policed throughout most of the previous century. Constance McLaughlin Green once alluded to the title of a pamphlet published by the District League of Women Voters as a fair characterization of the history of the city in this respect: Washington, D.C.: A Tale of Two Cities. “For the historian quickly discovers that alongside a pride-inspiring capital, a place captivating to residents and visitors, stands a city ridden by frustration and impotence.”

Washington’s police shared in that frustration and impotence between 1800 and 1886.

The history of Washington’s police also supports the generalization that the administration of police forces in nineteenth-century America was too political in nature. Partisan use of the police by Washington mayors in the 1850’s led to the establishment in 1861 of an independent Board of Police Commissioners to supervise the Metropolitan Police Department. The Board was successful in reducing partisanship in the 1860’s, but its dominance by William J. Murtagh for his private ends led to its abolition in the 1870’s. When the D.C. Commissioners assumed supervision of the police in 1878, it was evident that personal and/or political use of the force had to cease. In that respect the Commissioners were more successful than the Board of Police. However, there was no assurance that the Commissioners would know anything about police administration, and too often between 1878 and 1886 they selected police chiefs on the basis of personal friendship rather than professional competence. On the other hand, as we have seen, there was hope that in police administration some lessons had been learned by 1886 which would enable the Metropolitan Police to move toward greater professionalism.

Another recurring theme in the history of the Washington police is the marginal character of the personnel. The typical policeman in the nation’s capital was not prepared for the duties and responsibilities of his office. Prior to the 1890’s, when civil service examinations came into use, about all the prospective policeman had to do to be named to the force was to fill out an application and pass a physical exam. As already indicated, being a Union veteran became an additional prerequisite after the Civil War, although a few appointments of non-veterans were made during that period. Having political pull was always advantageous, especially if the applicant could get the endorsement of a congressman.

Since police work usually involved a twelve-to-fourteen hour day, seven days a week, and pay was too low to attract outstanding candidates, policemen were most often drawn from the lower strata of society. They presumably chose to be policemen because they could find no other work, and they received no police training before assuming police duties. This was hardly a desirable background for individuals who
were expected to be disinterested public servants and who were given great discretionary authority. As historian James F. Richardson has concluded, “their decision to shoot or not, or to make an arrest or let someone go with a warning and a box on the ears, determined whether a man or boy kept or lost his most precious possessions, his life and his liberty.”

At times policemen would abuse their authority and trample upon the rights of society. Charges of police brutality are not unique to the twentieth century. Incidents of assault by police officers upon women, children, prisoners, and other citizens are sprinkled through the first eighty-six years of police history in the nation’s capital. Use of unnecessary police force against Washington’s sizable black population had its origins in the enforcement of the pre-Civil War black codes, and allegations of police brutality toward blacks were still being made in the 1880’s. This overzealous use of police power was often sanctioned by society at large when it was directed mainly toward the poor or the black, for they were presumed to make up the criminal element.

Police brutality often took the form of reckless use of weapons. That the police would be armed with revolvers was accepted by the 1880’s, but the manner in which the guns were used aroused controversy. The shooting death of policeman John H. Fowler in 1884 illustrated this issue. The National Republican noted his death in a story which charged the police with reckless use of firearms: “The wonder is that more policemen are not killed,” since revolvers have “become agents of passion or cowardly brutality rather than peace preservers.” The National Republican was virtually alone in its protest. Other papers supported the policemen’s use of revolvers, and, more importantly, so did the courts. As long as the policemen did not blatantly murder unarmed citizens, they could rest assured that their use of weapons would be generally condoned.

While the tough and sometimes brutal patrolman would probably be allowed to remain on the force, the drunken one was usually fired. There was a relatively high turnover among police personnel until the 1880’s, and the prime cause for forced dismissal was intoxication. There was really no screening of the applicants, so it might be expected that the police department would have its share of alcoholics and immoral characters. However, it is still frightening that such persons were allowed the discretionary power alluded to earlier.

It would be unfair not to mention the exemplary record of a majority of policemen. They faithfully carried out their duties, even though they were not always appreciated or rewarded adequately. Beyond the obvious and necessary contributions these policemen made to a more ordered and peaceful society, they often performed special charitable functions. In time most of these services, such as the sanitary detail, would be taken over by other agencies. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century hundreds of dedicated policemen attended to the needs of thousands of people in the nation’s capital.

By the end of 1886 the Washington police had reached a turning point in its history. The capital city could no longer tolerate the weaknesses that had characterized the police up to that date. Police reform was needed, and now that the Metropolitan Police Department had survived twenty-five turbulent years, perhaps real reform was possible.

It was clear what had to be done to improve the Washington police. Police administration needed stabilization and centralization. Police chiefs had to be carefully selected and then given control of the force. Too much interference with the chiefs and/or careless selection had too often led to instability. Police personnel needed to be increased and upgraded. A thoroughgoing civil service system was necessary to remove political influences and assure that quality applicants would be named to the force. Tighter physical, mental, and character screening would lower the percentage of inefficient, ineffective, and corrupt policemen. Increased salaries, improved working conditions, and strengthening the recently instituted pension system would attract better prospects and insure faithful policemen of old-age security. Training in the form of a school of instruction and closely supervised probationary periods would help the policeman prepare for his important role in society.

Some functional reforms were also necessary. For example, housing vagrants and
providing medical assistance could be handled by other agencies. The Washington police especially needed to get out of the business of providing temporary details to so many governmental functions. Vice control, if exercised, could be centralized under special tactical squads. More use of new technology was needed to give the force greater flexibility. Finally, an emphasis on police-community relations could increase understanding in that delicate area.⁹

Even with so many facets of the Washington police in need of improvement, a balanced conclusion should mention the grounds for limited optimism at the end of the period surveyed in this study. William C. Moore, who took over as Superintendent after Samuel H. Walker resigned amid the midst of scandal in 1886, brought some stability back to the police administration during his twelve-year tenure as chief. While the population of the District increased approximately 75% in the twenty years after 1886, Congress raised the numerical strength of the police force by over 160%. Thus, the police-to-people ratio was improving as the Metropolitan Police Department entered the twentieth century. The elimination of the army/navy requirement in 1887, and the introduction of civil service exams in the 1890's provided greater assurance that a better quality of personnel might be selected for the police corps. However, pay for the policemen did not rise significantly and continued to be a deterrent to recruitment at the turn of the century.

In respect to special functions, the Metropolitan Police Department began to divest itself of some of its extraneous services. For example, the practice of housing paupers and vagrants, common to the police in the nineteenth century, was discontinued shortly after 1900; private and governmental agencies took over the disbursement of charitable funds; after 1922, the M.P.D. no longer had to provide a special detail to serve at the White House. Finally, the extension of communication systems and the addition of bicycles and then motorized vehicles greatly improved police flexibility.⁶

Recent research in the field of police history has revealed that police reform in Washington and in other U.S. cities between 1890 and 1930 did indeed go far to correct many of the ills evident in Washington and elsewhere at the close of the period covered by the present monograph.⁷

Notes

⁸National Republican (Washington), 13 Sept. 1884.
⁸Many of these weaknesses were not unique to Washington, as indicated by Robert M. Fogelson, "Police Reform, 1890-1930," a paper delivered at the Organization of American Historians Convention, April 18, 1974.
⁸Fogelson, "Police Reform."
Bibliographical Note

Because of the rather haphazard organization of the Washington police prior to 1861, most of the information pertaining to that period had to be taken from newspapers and published local and federal documents. Almost every issue of the major newspapers published in Washington between 1800-1861 was consulted to determine the daily activities and problems of the police.

Record keeping improved after Congress established the Metropolitan Police Department in 1861. While newspapers and published documents continued to be important as sources for the 1861-1886 period, voluminous unpublished records were available. It is fortunate for the historian that the M.P.D. has turned over most of its nineteenth-century records to the National Archives.

Among the records held by the Archives, the most important and most fascinating were the Personnel Files of the policemen appointed to the force between 1861 and 1897. In the interest of time and practicality, I selected a random sampling of 100 personnel files from the total of 1,635 individual files available. The Archives first allowed me to number the files; then based upon the random numbers I derived from the Rand Corporation's book entitled A Million Random Digits, archival personnel pulled for me the 100 case files I requested. The sampling was used to make generalizations about the total personnel. I consulted additional case files to obtain further information on specific individuals not included in the sampling, but who were significant in the history of the force. In general, the case files are full of police and local history.

Primary Sources


   Arrest Book, Third Precinct, 1869-1871.
   Casualty Book, 1879-1887.
   Lists the areas of the city that needed street repairs, sanitary improvements, and similar services.

   Arranged chronologically, giving statistical information on the daily disposition of the whole force.

   Arranged chronologically and thereunder by precinct, giving name of the arrested person, time, age, color, nationality, occupation, marital status, literacy, complaint, complainant, officer, disposition, and judge.

   Arranged chronologically, giving time, description of incident, name of officer assigned. Includes notes, and daily roll calls which give officers' names and assignments.

   General and Special Orders, 1862-1863.
   Shows special assignments and general areas of concern to the police.

   General Orders, Fourth Precinct, 1877-1884.
   Interior, Department of, Office of the Secretary, Record Group 48, File 125, 1849-1878.
   National Archives.
   This file deals with applicants and appointees to the D.C. Board of Police Commissioners.

   Payroll Book, 1861-1866.
   Provides useful information on police salaries.

   Personnel Files, 1861-1897, 168 file boxes, 1,635 individual case files. Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland.
   Contains statistical information, letters of recommendation, complaints against police-
men, and Trial Board hearings. An extremely valuable source for local social history as well as police history.


*Police Telegraph Record*, 1880-1881. Lists messages sent and replies given, providing some insight concerning police activities.

*Property Book*, 1862-1875, 1 vol., c. 480 pp. Describes articles stolen, from whom taken, those recovered, by what officer, and disposition of the article.


*Record of Arrests*, 1869-1893, c. 420 pp. Arranged chronologically, for an unidentified area or precinct, giving date, time, name of person arrested, age, color, nationality, occupation, marital status, literacy, complaint, complainant, officer, and disposition.


*Register of Letters Received by the Metropolitan Police*, 1877-1878, 1 vol., 254 pp. Arranged chronologically, giving date of receipt, name of writer, purport of letter, and action taken.


*Return of Cases*, 1851-1852, 354 pp. One of the few documents predating 1861 which shows some of the internal workings of the force.

*Third Precinct Blotter*, July 1871-Jan. 1872, 1 vol., c. 580 pp. Gives roll calls and arrests; information on arrests include time, type of offense, name, and details surrounding arrest.

*Time Book*, 1861-1869, c. 560 pp. Arranged alphabetically, and thereunder chronologically, giving the name of the officer absent and the reason why.

2. Public Documents


These reports, as well as those of the Board of Police are valuable sources, for they provide the official views of the police administration as well as statistical information.


U.S., Statutes at Large. Vols. I-XX.


National Intelligencer (Washington), 1 Nov. 1802-27 Aug. 1861. A weekly until 1813, when it became a daily, it provides the best continuous coverage of local events until the 1840's.

National Republican (Washington), 1 July 1876-13 Sept. 1884.

The Globe (Washington), 1 Jan. 1835-31 Dec. 1836. Too political to be of much value for local events; it did carry minutes of city government meetings.

The National Era (Washington), 7 Jan. 1847-27 Dec. 1849. A voice for abolitionism, this paper paid special attention to the race issue.

The Washington Evening Star, 16 Dec. 1852-3 Feb. 1887, 28 June 1908, 13 Sept. 1931. Furnishes the best coverage of local history from 1858 through the 1880's. Twentieth century issues recalled police history.


Washington Post, 6 Dec. 1877-18 Feb. 1887. Used in combination with the Star to obtain thorough coverage of daily activities in Washington from 1878 onward.
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