

Winter Haven Police Department

In the very early days of the village there was little need for police protection, but after the city was incorporated, there was always a Town Marshall. Sometimes they stayed up all night and watched over the sleeping village. Other times they kept cows and pigs off the streets in the daytime. One of the first marshalls was a Mr. Sapp, but no one seems to recall his first name. He drove a two-wheeled cart pulled by a mule and acted as scavenger for the city.

Following Sapp was Marshall B. A. Norman. He did away with the wagon as most citizens had cess pools in their yards by that time. He rode a bicycle. "Doc" Griffin, father of Del the Barber, of whom we have written, served as Marshall following Norman. No one recalls why he was "Doc" Griffin, but he always went by that name. He lived on Spike Island, which seemed to be a piece of land out toward Dundee surrounded by water, at least a part of each year. Bert Waggoner followed Griffin as Marshall.

Bruce Woodham was next in line and by his time, it seemed best to have him on duty at nights. He was followed by Mrs. Pettijohn's father, Robert W. Hardy, who served until his health caused his retirement. Then a brother of Frank Vaughn - Benny, to his many friends - took over. By this time, the town was growing and the boom was about to start so a real police department became a necessity.

In those days the city hall was a small corrugated tin building on the back of the lot where the old city hall *was* recently torn down. The jail was in the same building. According to our informant, Neil M. "Tubby" Carn, who grew up here and worked for the city in some capacity most of his life, the first Police Chief was named Blue. We have searched the records but cannot find him listed any place and "Tubby" and Harry Booth cannot recall his full name. He must not have served very long. He was followed by James H. McKibben, and then Asa Barksdale. It is not strange that these men cannot remember Chief Blue, as that *was* the beginning of the hectic days of the boom.

The city changed from a Councilman form of government to that of three City Commissioners on January 1, 1924. The Commissioners were W. F. Boyd, Mayor; G. V. Juhier, and H. G. McCutcheon. The latter had been appointed to take the place of J. F. Wasmund, who passed away. Allen E. Walker was City Attorney, Don Register was City Judge, and on February 5 they appointed P. P. Pilcher as City Manager - our first. But there is no mention of the hiring of a Chief of Police, so we imagine this was left to the discretion of the City Manager, and not incorporated into the minutes.

The first time we find mention of the police in the City Clerk's minutes is in 1925 after Ray Gatens was employed to take Pilcher's place. Pilcher resigned as of January 1, 1925. In the early 1925

minutes we find mention of the City Manager asking the police to clear a block on East Park Street between Pine and Lake Streets, for skating between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00. Even then, the City Fathers tried to keep the young people busy and happy. If we had police then, instead of town marshalls, we must have had a Chief. Asbury Summerlin recalls a night marshal and a day marshal when he was mayor in 1922 and 1923. He says the night marshal was hired mainly to keep the cows off the streets and out of people's yards. They were driven into an enclosure and the owners paid to get them out and home.

Another good story we got along the way, but we promised to mention no names. It seems that a former marshal, not having too much to do, managed to get drunk and make a nuisance of himself, so that he *was* often arrested. Because he had been a good officer, he was treated leniently for some time. Some friend paid his fine, and he *was* allowed his freedom. But it began to be an old story. So one time when the usual friend was accosted for the fine, he suggested they put the culprit to pulling sandspurs on the school yard for ten days at hard labor. This was done. It cured the alcoholic. If he drank after that, he never allowed himself to be caught. Might be a good punishment for some of them nowadays.

Back to our story on the police department - and "Tubby" Cam. He recalls that when Ray Gatens came as City Manager, they needed another inspector since so much building was going on in 1925. "Tubby" was hired to assist L. J. Lynch. He had been working as a volunteer with the Fire Department for some time, so was well known among the city personnel. He was a young man in his twenties then, and they were all so busy with so many details of inspections of all kinds that there wasn't much time for fun.

So many people rushed into the city in those days - there soon had to be a large addition to the police department. Several of the old-timers say they think a great many people came from Northern cities who were regular gangsters. Louis Ball recalls that there were fifty-five members of the Police Force in those days. He is certain there was a Police Chief Blue, so we kept looking. His appointment must have occurred in 1925 under City Manager Gatens. The minutes of the City Commission meeting of October 6, 1925 mention that Police Chief J. W. Blue gave his report, so we found Ball and Carn correct.

We know that Charlie Fields, "Preacher" Ragsdale, Harry Booth, Babe Bush, Louis Ball, Grover Hinkle, Bill Joyce, Walter L. Bryan, James R. McKibben, Mallie Rowe, Asa Barksdale, DeWitt Sinclair, and Neil M. "Tubby" Carn all served on our police force and were each and everyone of them considered fine policemen in those days of the boom and following it.

Carn tells an interesting story about "Preacher" Ragsdale. He was a man who had been a preacher at one time, but came in here during the boom and got stranded, we imagine. At any rate he kept begging to serve on the police force until McKibben, who was then Chief, hired him. He was a fairly good officer but had a dreadful temper. He had



Winter Haven Police Force, December 9, 1934, Left to right: Tubby Carn, DeWitt Sinclair, Babe Bush, Louis Ball, Grover Hinkle and Harry Booth

arrested someone for speeding who had been going only about five miles an hour, just up to a red light. E. C. Wimberly was City Judge and he kept putting the case off, which angered "Preacher." Finally, Wimberly jokingly called the case one day and, of course, the man was not fined. "Preacher" rose in a rage in the court room, and called Judge Wimberly everything in the book before he stomped out. He sat on the front entrance of the old City Hall fuming and fussing with his gun in his hand, and the men inside were sure he meant to get the Judge. They also knew he had lost his badge, and that he hated Chief McKibben so much he would probably shoot him if he came out to ask for the badge. So "Tubby" and Fields, who knew Preacher liked them, decided that one of them should get the badge. "Tubby" volunteered to try first, and approached him with conciliatory speech, finally persuading him to hand it to him.

Asa Harkdale followed McKibben as Chief of Police. He was later offered a job of Deputy Sheriff and DeWitt Sinclair, who had been on the Police Force since 1928, was made Chief. In 1940 Sinclair ran for and was elected Sheriff of Polk County and Carn was made Chief. He had worked for years keeping records for the various chiefs and knew the ropes very well. He served five years as Chief. Things were not easy in the old days, especially when the city included the 17 square miles, with not half enough cars and always low pay. Carn resigned in 1945 because the job did not pay any more than that of Inspector, which he had held in the very early days. He had to be gone at nights, also, so he changed and became inspector.

Mallie Rowe followed Carn as Chief, Cletus Allen was City Manager by this time. Munsey Smith had joined the police force in 1938 under Sinclair. In 1947 Rowe was asked to resign by the City Manager and Munsey Smith was put in his place. He served as Chief for two years, when he resigned to start a chicken farm, and G. W. Hansford, a retired Chief from the North was hired.

Munsey Smith came back as Chief when Hansford retired in 1956, and has been Chief ever since. Things are quite different now than in the old days, Today as of mid-December 1969, the Police Department has 55 employees.

Munsey Smith is Chief, Thomas Wheeler is Captain and Patrol Commander. Under him are Lt. Victor Shumate, Lt. Derrell Burnham, Lt. Wayne Holley, Sgt. John Sellgren, Sgt. Dale McDonald, Sgt. David Dunaway and Sgt. Jim Turgeson. There are 19 patrolmen, two motorcycle officers - Roy Feagle and Leon Brown. Sgt. Harold Macon is in charge of communications with seven people under him - three men and four women.

Hamp Rogers is Chief of the Detectives with Lt. L. D. Woodard to assist him, and Sgt. Wayne Rogers, Otis Kurby, Maines Waters, Mayford Wallace, and Joel Wilburn (Identification Officer), all work in this department.

Mrs. Geraldine Campaign, Mrs. Doreene Troelson and Mrs. Dorothy Merriman are three records clerks; Lucy Chambliss is Firearms Instructor; Ronnie Martin is the Juvenile Officer, serving also as Clerk of the Court and of Records, and Carl Aleck is the Supervisor of Services.