

The Evening Star, January 9, 1877
History of the Police Force of Washington
Its Rise and Changes
Interesting data

In view of the action in Congress looking to the abolishment of the Police Board and the transfer of their powers and duties to the Commissioners of the District, the particulars of the organization and growth of our police force will be of interest at this time.

When the city was in reality one "of magnificent distances," in 1842, numbering less than 25,000 inhabitants, the entire District in the census previous to 1840) footing up but 43,712, Congress passed, an act establishing the Auxiliary guard—a captain, five sergeants and ten privates. Prior to this time the only regular force for the preservation of the peace consisted of the police constables appointed by the mayor—one in each of the six wards, with the exception of the Third ward, which had two, making a total force of seven men who were paid by fees. The act of Congress establishing the Auxiliary guard was approved August 23, 1842, and provided for the appointment by the mayor of the city of a captain at a salary of \$1,000 per annum, and fifteen members of the force, five at \$35 per month and the others at \$30. Almost immediately after the passage of the act Captain John H. Goddard was appointed the captain of the guard by Mayor Seaton, as also the fifteen members, among whom were Solomon Hubbard, John E. Little, Thos. McGill, George H. Grant, James H. Birch, J.F. Wollard and E.G. Handy. With this force the police constables acted, being on duty during daylight, the Auxiliary guard being on duty at night. This force was subsequently increased to 30 men, and the corporation having by act of March 11th, 1851, increased the number of police constables to 15, made a total force for day and night duty of 45 men, under Captain Goddard. Under this system there were three station houses or lock-ups, one at the Center market, but in each ward there was a police justice, at all hours of the day accessible, making it unnecessary to keep parties locked up long for a hearing. Under the administration of Mayor Maury Captain Goddard was removed, and H. Nelson Steele was made chief of police, and Captain J.H. Birch, captain of the auxiliary guard, and subsequently these positions were filled by John N. Davis and John Mills. When Mayor Berrett came in (1858) the city had not the best reputation for the maintenance of order and he immediately urged on Congress the passage of an act increasing the number of the guard to 50 men, and also the councils to pass an act providing for a like number, with two lieutenants, and appointed Captain Goddard to the position of chief and captain. These measures having passed, the efficiency of the former force was greatly increased by the prompt appointment of the men—the lieutenancies being given to Noble J. Thomas and Edward McHenry (the latter being now on the metropolitan force.)

Reorganization of the Force

This was the force for the preservation of the peace in the city of Washington, when the rebellion broke out in 1861, but it soon became apparent that the police force needed reorganization and strengthening. So small a number of men were totally inadequate for an emergency, and as the sectional lines came to be tightly drawn, there was considerable talk as to whether certain members of the force could be trusted. While none doubted the loyalty of Captain Goddard and a portion of his men, there were some (and several of them consequently went south), who were not looked on as loyal men. The question of increasing the force or establishing.

A Metropolitan System

Such as had been for some years in operation in London, New York, Baltimore, and other large cities, became one of much interest. It was urged that a much larger force was necessary, and also that it

should be entirely free and independent of political influences and this latter argument was the main one used by the advocates of the measure before Congress. By midsummer, when the city had become filled with troops it became apparent that the passage of such a bill was an urgent necessity.

July 16, 1861, Mr. Conkling introduced a bill as an amendment to an act to establish an auxiliary watch for the protection of public and private property in the city of Washington. The amendment provided that the appointment of the watch or guard shall be taken from the mayor and given to the Secretary of the Interior. On the same day the Washington City Police bill, authorizing the President and Speaker of the House to appoint the auxiliary guard, was passed by the Senate.

The present act for the establishment of the force was approved August 6, 1861, and a few days thereafter the following were appointed commissioners: Zenas C. Robbins, Joseph F. Brown and Richard Wallach, from the city; Wm. H. Tenney, from Georgetown, and Sayles J. Bowen, from the county.

The First Meeting

Of the Police Commissioners was held in the morning of Monday, August 19, 1861, in the aldermen's chamber, City Hall, quite a crowd of spectators being present. The oath of office was administered by Justice John H. Johnson to all but Mayor Berret, who declined to take it on the ground that it was superfluous. Mayor Berret and Messrs. Richard Wallach and Joseph F. Brown, of Washington; Mayor Addison and Mr. William H. Tenney, of Georgetown, and Sayles J. Bowen, of the county, present; Mr. Robbins was absent from the city at that time. Mayor Berret called the meeting to order. Mr. Tenney moved the session be held with closed doors, which was adopted, and the room was cleared. The board organized permanently by the election of Richard Wallach as president, J.F. Brown as treasurer, and Thomas A. Lazenby as clerk. At the meeting of the board on August 24th, on motion of Mr. Berret, the auxiliary guard was continued in service until September 1. On August 31st the board fixed the standard height of policemen at five feet six inches, agreed upon a sub-division of the police precincts, and elected fifty-six patrolmen for Washington. The Auxiliary Guard were notified that their term of office expired on that day, and their last tour of duty ended on Sunday morning, September 1st. On September 3d Mr. Wm. B. Webb, the first superintendent, was elected, and at the same meeting, it having been decided that an ex officio member could not hold an office, Mr. Wallach having been in the meantime elected mayor of Washington in place of Mr. Berret, who had been arrested by the military authorities, Mr. Z.C. Robbins was elected president. On September 7th the board commenced making appointments and a sergeant and twenty-three patrolmen were elected for the Georgetown precinct. The officers were mostly sworn in on September 10th, 1861, and went on duty on the following day, under Superintendent Webb. The force then consisted of ten sergeants and 150 privates or patrolmen—16 acting as roundsmen (a position now filled by the sergeants.) Superintendent Webb continued in office until December 1st, 1864, when his resignation was accepted and Major A.C. Richards, the president superintendent, was appointed to the position. In July, 1862, the Board were authorized to employ six detectives, and on the 9th of September the following were appointed: Michael Barry, John R. Cronin, John T. Donaldson, Christopher V. Hogan, Wm. M. Kelly, and David G. McKelvey. Three of these hailed from New York (Barry, Hogan, and McKelvey). Messrs. Donaldson, Cronin, and Kelly were from this city, and Mr. Kelly died in the service, and Messrs. Donaldson and Cronin resigned. The New York portion of the force did not stand very high in the estimation of the community.

In 1863 Mr. George S. Gideon was the president of the board, and it consisted of the same members with the exception that Mr. Bowen having moved into the city he was appointed to fill Mr. Robbins place, and Mr. Richard Butt was appointed to fill the county vacancy. The personnel of the board was the same in '64 and in '63, but in 1865 Dr. C.H. Nichols and W.J. Murtagh filled the places of Joseph F.

Brown and Richard Butt. In '66 Samuel Norment, Peter F. Bacon, and C.S. English were members in the places of Messrs. Gideon, Tenney, and Bowen—Dr. Nichols being the president and Mr. Murtagh the treasurer. The personnel continued the same in '67 and '68; but in 1869 Mr. Bowen was the president with Mr. Murtagh treasurer, and Messrs. H.M. Sweeny, D.V. Burr, W.H. Chase, C.H. Cragin, and D.F. Hamlink as members. In 1870 Mr. Murtagh was president and Mr. Burr treasurer and they continued in '71, '72.

The present detective force consists of John A.W. Clarvoe, (chief) who was commissioned in 1863; James A. McDevitt, appointed on force December 6th, 1861, made detective November 6th, 1862; J.W. Coomes, appointed as a private in 1864, promoted detective November 22d, 1866; George O. Miller, appointed on force December 11th, 1862, made detective November 22d, 1866; George McElfresh, appointed on force June 13th, 1862, and detective July 18th, 1872.