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THE GROWTH AND CHANGING FUNCTIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE

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VICTOR A. RAPPORT¹
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The origin of the Connecticut Department of State Police goes back to 1884, although the department itself was not created until nearly twenty years later. No one could have predicted that the Law and Order League of Connecticut, organized in the latter part of the year 1884 to fight violations of liquor license laws, would lead to a department which, fifty years later, would concern itself with a variety of activities including such apparently remote things as the licensing of electricians, auctioneers, and junk dealers.

It is apparent from publications of the times, that the latter half of the nineteenth century was marked with violations of laws relating to the sale of intoxicants, and that in many instances the violators were not being prosecuted to an extent desired by the more law-abiding citizens, the so-called "public spirited" members of the community. The chief source of difficulty seems to have been two-fold, either that actual "protection" was given the liquor dealers by corrupt politicians and police or that prosecuting and police officials were intimidated through the political power of the violators—the threat of defeat at the polls or removal from appointive office. To lend the support of the upright members of society, the Law and Order League of Connecticut was organized in 1884, a branch of a similar national organization. Its object was stated in its constitution as being "to secure, by all proper means, obedience to the laws of this state, especially the laws relating to the traffic in intoxicating liquors." That its purpose was not the prohibition of liquor was set forth by the League's president, Edward Payne of Middletown, in his address to the group at its first annual meeting:²

"If . . . any inquire why we exist, our answer is:

I. That we may unify and make effective a growing sentiment against the lawlessness of the liquor traffic, which can find expression

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² *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Law and Order League of Connecticut*, Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., Hartford, 1885.

in no other existing organization. Our platform is broad." [Here follows the statement of object which is given above.] "Here is no selection of political parties or religious denominations. Men of opposing views in other matters may here unite for one clearly-defined object—the enforcement of law. Many of our citizens are not in favor of *prohibitory* [italics are theirs] laws relating to the liquor traffic. They cannot cooperate with temperance societies holding so-called radical views; but they will give their personal influence, their time, and some money to an organization which proposes simply to execute the restrictive laws now on the statute book. . . . We here gather diverse and widely-scattered forces into a solid and wieldy organism, to forward a great national movement, which commends itself by its one idea—*enforcement of existing laws.*

II. We exist that we may reenforce our prosecuting agents. . . . The liquor laws of our state are conspicuously feeble through a lack of executive force. . . . The prosecuting agent has occasionally shut the door of a saloon, and possibly lodged the proprietor in jail for a few days, but the lawlessness of the liquor dealers is not appreciably abated. Whatever may be our individual opinions—as a league, we admit that the man holding a license for the sale of intoxicating liquors cannot be molested in his trade, so long as he conducts his business according to the terms of that license. We do not here sit in judgment on the morality of his business. But the state appoints a prosecuting agent to watch him—'to inquire diligently into and prosecute all violations of the laws relating to the sale of spirituous and intoxicating liquors.' But the prosecuting agent alone is insufficient as against the studied arts of the liquor dealer. The closely-drawn curtain of the saloon is his coat of mail."

No record exists regarding the fate of this organization, although it would appear that it did not meet with complete success. A re-organization was effected nearly ten years later as the Citizens' Law and Order League of Connecticut. This group, begun in 1892, held its first annual meeting in New Haven on September 20, 1893. Detectives had been hired to secure evidence and the organization pushed the prosecution of offenders. As a result the meeting was informed, in part, of the results of the League's labors:

Number of places investigated by our agents.....	256
Number of warrants issued.....	269
Number of persons arrested.....	119
Number of law-breakers who fled from justice.....	2
Number of convictions obtained.....	209

The success of the organization and the enthusiasm of its members led to its incorporation in 1895. In doing this, the group dropped its name and reverted to the older form, the Law and Or-

der League of Connecticut. Section 3 of the act of incorporation³ stated that "the object of said corporation is to promote industry, prosperity, good order, and obedience to law throughout the state, to collect and disseminate information bearing upon these subjects, and to assist in the enforcement of laws relating to chastity, gaming, and intoxicating liquors." The League was apparently answering the need for adaptation to the complexity of immorality it found in connection with its original enemy, the liquor trade.

The reason which eight years later was to lead to the organization of a state police department was adumbrated in one provision of the act of incorporation. Criticism directed at the unofficial nature of its investigators led the League to seek authority for them. This authority was granted in Section 4 of the Act which provided that:

"The governor of this state, upon the application of the directors or executive committee of said corporation, may from time to time, commission one or more persons, not exceeding four, designated by them who shall be officially known as agents of the Law and Order League of Connecticut, shall hold office at the pleasure of the governor, and shall be sworn to a faithful discharge of the duties imposed upon them. These agents, when so appointed shall have the same power, in any part of the state, to serve process and make arrests upon legal warrant in all matters relating to chastity, gaming, and intoxicating liquors as constables have in their respective towns, and shall receive the same fee therefor as though resident in the town where the prosecution is instituted. It shall be their duty diligently to inquire after and seek out all violations of the law relating to the matters aforesaid."

The League also sought to remedy the difficulties entailed in prosecution by having its own agents designated as special prosecutors. Section 5 of the Act granted the corporation the power to "appoint one or more persons who, after their appointment has been approved by a judge of the superior court, shall have the right, upon the trial of any cause relating to the matters aforesaid, to assist any grand juror or other prosecuting officer who may request such assistance."

Success was achieved along two lines during the year 1895, but a fundamental difficulty appeared which was to lead to the eventual dissolution of the organization and the genesis of the department of state police. The incorporation of the League with authorized agents was one victory; the other came in the form of continuation of its efforts. During the year covered in the annual report, 325

³ *Special Laws of Connecticut*, 1895, House Joint Resolution No. 388.

places were investigated and 134 persons were arrested, of whom 108 were convicted.

The difficulty which arose in 1895 was not particularly new, but assumed greater significance through the Act which gave quasi-official status to the League's agents. Formerly they had been employees of a private organization; now, as agents of the state, they were subject to direct attack. The term "snooper" grew in popularity as a designation for these representatives of the Law and Order League, and frequent references occur in the League's publications attempting to justify their work and to foster the more dignified appellation of "detective."

The League by now had expanded its original program and was attacking houses of prostitution, gamblers, and dealers in obscene literature. This widening of the scope of the organization inevitably increased its enemies, not only among the vendors of illicit products but also among certain citizens who wished to purchase the banned articles. During the next year there appeared a movement, not formally organized, to secure the repeal of the charter provisions and dissolve the corporation. A resolution was presented to the 1897 session of the Connecticut General Assembly seeking this end. While the question was pending, Samuel P. Thrasher, Secretary and General Manager of the League, and the League Directors issued a brochure entitled "Should the Charter of the Law and Order League Be Repealed?" The statement was made in this publication that the move to repeal the charter "will be supported by the gamblers, brothel-keepers and illegal liquor-sellers." The hearing on the bill to repeal the charter was attended by large numbers of sympathizers with the league while "only one man had the courage to lift his voice against the league, and his plea was weakness itself."⁴ Although the attempt to dissolve the League was unsuccessful, one important change was made in the charter. This change was one more step in the evolution of a state police.

Article 4 of the 1895 charter, which provided for the commissioning by the governor of from one to four agents *designated by the directors or executive committee of the League* was amended⁵ to read: "The governor, upon the application of the directors or executive committee of said corporation, may, from time to time,

⁴ *The Law and Order League of Connecticut, Report of Directors, December 1, 1897, p. 15.*

⁵ *Special Laws of Connecticut, 1897, Substitute for Senate Joint Resolution No. 100.*

commission one or more persons, not exceeding four, who shall be officially known as agents of the Law and Order League of Connecticut, shall hold office at the pleasure of the governor . . ." and continued with the provisions regarding power and fees. The important emendation of the words "designated by them," which appeared in the original charter, took from the League its power of selection of agents and delegated it to the governor.

The placing of the League's agents under more direct state control did not, however, reduce attacks upon the organization itself. These appear to have continued until, in 1903, we find a bill introduced in the General Assembly calling for the creation of a state police. Mr. Thrasher, who had been the backbone and prime mover of the League, must have realized that the ends of the organization could not be realized so effectively under its private or quasi-official status. A pamphlet was issued by him in 1903 entitled "The State Police Bill With Reasons for Its Adoption." In this is the revealing statement: "The State Police Bill . . . is the result of careful study of the conditions affecting the enforcement of criminal law in Connecticut." It is interesting to note that Mr. Thrasher's comments on the bill make no reference to the failure of the League to secure the greatest measure of success; it is only by implication that one may deduce such a conclusion. It seems improbable that a person and a group, engaged for over a decade in a work to accomplish their ideals, and possessing a power to accomplish that goal, should voluntarily seek the creation of another group which would take over those tasks.

The proposed bill called for the appointment by the judges of the superior court of eight commissioners (one of whom Mr. Thrasher hoped to be—but wasn't) who were to have control of the department. The bill⁶ as passed in the 1903 session reduced the number to five. The commissioners were directed to appoint a superintendent and assistant superintendent and from five to ten policemen (eight were suggested in the proposed bill). The primary purpose of the department was to enforce "laws relating to intoxicating liquors and gaming," with the additional provision that "Whenever said state policemen shall not be engaged in any specific work as provided for in this section, they shall, under such rules as may be made by said commissioners, and under the direction of said superintendent, use their best endeavors to prevent

⁶ *An Act to Establish and Maintain a State Police Department*, Public Acts of Connecticut, 1903, Chapter 141, Sections 1-18.

crime, preserve the peace of the state, and secure the detection, arrest, and conviction of offenders.”⁷

Another provision of the bill creating the department (Section 5) was the first of a long list of functions which were later to be added to the state police. This specified that on and after July 1, 1905, the superintendent of state police was to act as the state fire marshal.

The possibility of the state police being the supreme police authority of the state with power to direct all other police officers under whatever jurisdiction is contained in Section 7.

Any member of said state police department may request any sheriff or deputy sheriff in any county, any policeman of any city, or any constable of any town, to assist in the investigation, detection, and prosecution, of criminal offenses within his jurisdiction, and such officer shall, when so requested, render all reasonable assistance, and shall be paid as hereinafter provided. Any sheriff or constable may, and any deputy sheriff or policeman, with the consent of the authority to which he is subject, shall, go to any part of the state when required by the superintendent of the state police, and while acting under the authority of said superintendent, shall have all the powers conferred upon state policemen under the provisions of this act.

The latter sentence of this section has been retained, with a significant change, in the present laws of Connecticut.⁸ It has been broadened to read “Any person may, and any deputy sheriff or policeman, etc.” Although almost never employed by the commissioner of state police, this provision could serve as an entering wedge should the state ever decide to go over to a unified police system.

Few of the biennial sessions of the General Assembly since 1903 have not added to the functions of the department either in answer to the increasing needs of the state or in recognition of additional uses which could be made of the department. The size of the department has been consistently increased. Starting with the original five to ten policemen, the limit was increased in 1913 to fifteen; under the departmental reorganization in 1921, it was jumped to 50; in 1923, to 80; in 1925, to 90; in 1927, to 100; in 1929, to 125; in 1935, to 175; and in 1937, to 225.⁹

The next major task assigned the department was control over

⁷ *Ibid.*, Section 4.

⁸ *General Statutes of Connecticut* (Revision of 1930), Section 2298.

⁹ Public Acts, 1913, Chapter 121; P. A. 1921, Chapter 273, section 2; P. A., 1923, C. 202, s. 1; P. A., 1925, C. 37, s. 1; P. A., 1927, C. 292, s. 3; P. A., 1929, C. 214, s. 3; P. A., 1935, C. 127, s. 896c; P. A., 1937, C. 127, s. 563d(a).

motion picture houses, machines, films, and the licensing of motion picture machine operators. While this was originally an incidental outgrowth of the superintendent's duties as state fire marshal, it has today become a major function of the department with two inspectors and several assistants specially assigned to the work. An adaptation to the situation is the department's policy of offering advice, upon request, to architects during the planning and construction of motion picture theaters.

The departmental work in control of motor vehicles demonstrates the institutional theories of Sumner and Keller.¹⁰ First "crescive" and then "enacted," a "rational element" being added after the formalization, and representing an "adjustment to life conditions," the department's efforts along this line grew consistently. Only one arrest for "violation of highway law" was made in 1908,¹¹ the first year in which such violations appear in the reports. Two arrests were made in 1909, and three the following year. The growing complexity of automotive traffic brought 71 arrests in the fiscal year ending June 30, 1911; these represent 17.9% of the total arrests made by the department. During the 1911 session of the General Assembly, the whole matter of motor vehicles came under scrutiny and a general law was passed¹² modernizing the former attitudes, and providing in one section (24) that the state police might be called upon to aid in enforcement. This law, however, did not take effect until August 1, 1911, at which time the Department of State Police was already one month into its second year of major concern with motor vehicle offenses. In later years, as will be seen, this type of law violation was to become the chief source of state police arrests.

The functions which have been added to the department by statute are, chronologically, as follows:

- 1903 Appointment as state fire marshal.
- 1907 Control over motion picture houses, etc.
- 1911 Aid in enforcement of motor vehicle laws.
Power to examine books of pawnbrokers.
- 1913 Aid to superintendent of fisheries and game.
Appointment of superintendent of state police as state superintendent of weights and measures.

¹⁰ Sumner, W. G.: *Folkways*, Ginn & Co., Boston, 1906, pp. 53-55; Sumner, W. G., and Keller, A. G.: *The Science of Society*, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, 1927, p. 35.

¹¹ All data concerning arrests are taken from the annual or biennial Reports to the Governor. No report was made for the year 1921, and no records for that period are available. In all references to years, the fiscal year ending June 30 is intended.

¹² P. A., 1911, C. 85.

- 1919 Licensing of amusement parks.
Licensing of concealed weapons.
- 1921 Examination for license to operate motor vehicle (subsequently returned to Motor Vehicle Department).
Licensing of highway advertising signs.
Joint control with local fire marshals over licensing to manufacture, store, transport, and sell explosives.
- 1923 Licensing for retail sale of pistols and revolvers.
- 1925 Licensing of auctioneers.
- 1927 Power to approve fuel oil burners and storage tanks.
Power to approve amusement rides in West Haven.
- 1929 Aid to Aeronautics Commissioner.
- 1935 Licensing of motor vehicle races.
Registration of machine guns.
Commissioner appointed a member of State Traffic Commission.
Registration of junk dealers.
- 1937 Commissioner may appoint State Park Police to aid State Park and Forest Commission.
May appoint agents of Conn. Humane Society as special police.
May appoint special police in state institutions and lands.
May appoint special police for any electric, gas, telephone, telegraph, or water company for their land or premises.
May appoint special police for any railroad, street railway, steamboat company or any corporation having control of roads in any private residence park.
Licensing of workers doing electric wiring or work.
To make regulations regarding soot removers.
Registration of persons selling milk bottles.
Licensing of public weighmasters.

This list should not be taken to indicate the total activities of the department. In addition to these statutory requirements, many other duties are regularly assumed at the request of divisions of the state government. Likewise, one should not assume that the record of arrests indicates the full measure of the department's work. As with all other police departments, arrests represent only a small part of the tasks for which the department is called upon. It is safe to say that the majority of investigations do not end in an arrest, and that the greater part of the time of the Connecticut Department of State Police is spent in work serving a public good, but which appears in reports under the prosaic title of "Investigations." Reference has already been made to consultation with architects regarding motion picture theaters. The same might be said for preliminary advice dealing with storage places for explosives or the manufacture of new types of scales and measuring devices.

The internal organization and administration also changed during this period of growth. The original act, it will be remembered, called for the appointment of five commissioners by the judges of the superior court, with terms of two years. These men were to serve without pay, except for such necessary traveling costs as they might incur. The commissioners appointed a superintendent and assistant superintendent. These provisions remained in force until 1915, when authorization was granted to designate from the five to fifteen policemen one captain, one lieutenant and one sergeant. In 1919, the office of assistant superintendent was abolished. A significant reorganization occurred in 1921 when the old method of appointment of commissioners was abandoned, and the board of police commissioners reduced from five to three. The state comptroller and the commissioner of motor vehicles were named *ex officio*, and the governor was empowered to name the third commissioner, now given a term of four years but still without salary. The increase in the personnel of the department that year was recognized with the creation of one additional sergeancy and the post of deputy superintendent of weights and measures. The officering of the department was again increased in 1923 when, besides the superintendent, provision was made for a captain, a lieutenant, an inspector-instructor with rank of senior sergeant, nine sergeants, and the deputy superintendent of weights and measures.

Another important revision was made in 1927 when the department was taken from the three non-salaried commissioners and turned over to a single commissioner, who was to serve for four years with an annual salary of \$6,000. The officers were to be: a captain, a first lieutenant, a lieutenant-inspector and instructor (one post), inspector of weights and measures, eight lieutenants and nine sergeants. The post of superintendent was dropped in 1929 with that of major being created. In the same year, the post of lieutenant-inspector was abolished, the work since then having been taken over by the first lieutenant. In 1931, with the ranking officers remaining the same, the lieutenantancies were increased to ten and the sergeancies to nine, with the additional commissioning of two motion picture theater inspectors. The lieutenantancies were increased again in 1935, now to twelve, one of whom was to be detailed as deputy fire marshal, and the sergeancies were increased to eleven. The General Assembly, in 1937, recognized the need for internal control in the growing department and provided for the creation of an inspector of weights and measures, two motion pic-

ture inspectors, and "such number of majors, captains, lieutenants, sergeants and corporals as [the commissioner] may deem necessary to efficiently officer the state police force." The salary of the commissioner was increased in 1935 and again in 1936, then reaching its present figure of \$9,060.

The growth of the departmental size and functions has naturally been accompanied by an increased cost. No specific appropriation was made for the department during the biennium 1903-1905, but for the six years following 1905, the annual cost to the state was \$25,000. The appropriation for the biennium 1919-1921 (the years prior to the expansion of the department) had mounted to \$126,680. The next biennium (1921-23) carried it to \$444,000, and from then on it continued to grow until it reached the million dollar mark in 1931-33. The appropriation for the biennium ending June 30, 1939, is \$1,576,448; for the period 1939-1941, an appropriation of approximately \$1,800,000 was granted.

A steady transition occurred away from the purpose in the minds of Samuel Thrasher and his associates in the Law and Order League. Violations of the liquor law, which by an evolutionary process brought the department into being accounted for 70% of the department's arrests in its initial year, but declined thereafter (despite national Prohibition), until they represented less than one per cent of arrests in the year 1938. Gambling and vice, the secondary enemies of the original plan, have declined from 20% of the causes of arrest to consistently less than 10% since 1921. The arrests of the department, divided into four major groupings by percentage, are presented in Chart I. One should not conclude from these figures that the department is neglecting its original tasks. A study of the figures showing the actual number of arrests for these causes shows a somewhat different picture (Chart II). The actual number of arrests for gambling and vice has increased steadily but slowly, while arrests for violation of liquor laws increased until 1926, but has declined since then. Both charts clearly indicate the increased importance of motor vehicle laws, a situation reflected in the last two increases in the personnel of the department. The increase to 175 men in 1935 was accompanied by a provision that 30 of these be specially designated for motor patrol, and the increase to 225 in 1937 raised that number to 75. In addition to these men, other members of the force are assigned to that duty to handle week-end traffic and at such other times as hazard

is increased. The state Department of Motor Vehicles also maintains a motor patrol.

The growth of the department and its duties is far from complete. In the thirty-six years of its existence, it has developed as an adaptation to changing conditions and increased needs. The department has demonstrated its ability to improve on the quality of work formerly done by town constables and by deputy sheriffs, with the result that more and more of the rural towns call upon the state police for assistance. As formal control replaces the folkways and mores, so a professionalized police force is replacing the untrained civilian-policeman. One may predict with confidence that the time is not distant when the state police department will have assumed, in addition to many administrative duties, the major role in police work in the state.