

1947

Police Science Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

Police Science Book Reviews, 37 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 446 (1946-1947)

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POLICE SCIENCE BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by
Ralph F. Turner*

SELECTION OF POLICE OFFICERS. By Richard L. Holcomb, Bureau of Public Affairs. State University of Iowa. 1946. Pp. 94. \$1.00.

"Good policemen are the basis for good police work. No matter what physical equipment a department has, no matter how well housed or uniformed it is, it will not be a good law-enforcement agency unless the men employed are of the highest type." With this opening statement, the reviewer is in wholehearted agreement. Professor Holcomb then proceeds to set forth his conclusions as to the best methods and procedures for obtaining these qualified men. He points out that every possible means should be used not only to let possible applicants know that the police department needs men, but also to tell them of the advantages of police employment. He suggests that it is a good practice to list the qualifications for the job. This will eliminate many who are not qualified, will encourage those who are, and will have the psychological effect of increasing interest by requiring abilities that other persons do not have.

It is suggested that the best source of publicity is the local newspaper. Other media suggested are radio, official bulletins, talks at schools and colleges, veteran and service organizations, and word-of-mouth campaigns. A recent survey conducted in the reviewer's department indicates that the word-of-mouth campaign is most effective. It should be especially effective in a small community.

The California State Peace Officers Association's recently approved minimum standards are in substantial agreement with the minimum qualifications advocated by Professor Holcomb, which are, roughly:

- Age: 21-30, inclusive;
- Education: High school graduation, or its equivalent;
- Residence: None required;
- Physical
 - Condition: Excellent, as indicated by a thorough physical examination;
- Height: 5'8", to 6'4";
- Weight: Related to height, not less than 150 pounds;
- Eyesight: Good vision without glasses, perfect vision with glasses.

The waiving of local residence requirements is a major advance in widening the field of potential candidates.

The most valuable single procedure of the many advocated by Professor Holcomb is the background investigation. This is a difficult process, but it pays big dividends. One poor policeman will cost the department many times what a careful investigation will cost. It has been our experience that schools, former employers, and neighbors are much better sources of information than references given, as such, by the applicant. The public relations value of such investigations should not be overlooked. Our own investigators have met with only friendly cooperation, our citizens being greatly pleased to learn that their police department is going to such lengths to secure

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the best possible material. Such investigations also impress the applicants with the value and importance of the positions for which they have applied.

The author points out what every experienced police executive knows—that the factors we group together and call “personality” are of extreme importance in the success or failure of a police officer. “It is unfortunate that there is no good way to measure the emotional stability, personal adjustment, appearance, ethical standards, sense of humor, perseverance, honesty, integrity, and similar points that are so basic to the proper evaluation of an applicant.” The author indicates that tests in this field have not been generally successful, but that some tests seem to have merit and should be of material help, especially to the larger departments. This reviewer agrees with his suggestion that the background investigation and the oral interview will be of assistance in evaluating these personal qualities.

Professor Holcomb goes thoroughly into the matter of the oral interview, including the selection of a rating board, the qualities to be rated, the conduct of the interview itself, and the method of scoring. One of his many excellent suggestions is that a member of the police department be included in the rating or oral board.

The author divides physical examinations into three categories: (1) health; (2) physical stamina; and (3) physical dexterity and strength. He comes to the conclusion that examinations for physical stamina are not justified. The reviewer questions the validity of this conclusion. It is highly questionable whether stamina, dexterity, and strength can be separated or measured independently. Our own practice is to include them all in a physical agility test. A very thorough health or medical examination must, of course, be given.

It is a source of satisfaction to note that a long probationary period is recommended as a part of the selection process, and that probationary officers are to be assigned to work only with selected older officers who should be given a special course of instruction to better qualify them as trainers.

As a whole, this work by Professor Holcomb represents the consensus of the most advanced thinkers in the field of police personnel administration. It should prove of material assistance to police executives and others charged with the duty of recruitment and selection of police officers.

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RICHARD SIMON.

