

1951

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Recommended Citation

Lois Higgins, Historical Background of Policewomen's Service, 41 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 822 (1950-1951)

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POLICEWOMEN'S SERVICE

Lois Higgins

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EDITOR.

As early as 1880 the movement for women police was promulgated by such national bodies as the Federation of Women's Clubs, the National League of Women Voters, the National Women's Christian Temperance Union; and by local associations and clubs, including social agencies operating in the protective field; and by social hygiene groups.¹ Also active were the Men's City Clubs of Chicago and Philadelphia. According to Mrs. J. E. Barney in her reports of the work in prisons, jails, police, and alms homes,

During the last half of the nineteenth century, women's organizations manifested an interest in securing the appointment of women for the special handling of women and girls held in custody by law enforcing agency—police, sheriffs, superintendents of jails, detention homes, institutions for the insane, and any publicly controlled institutions. The records show that in 1845 two such appointments were made, through the interest of the American Female Society and two matrons were appointed in New York City at the City Prison (The Tombs) and four on Blackwell's Island—the first prison matrons in this country. Particularly active in the field of organizations to secure women in the service, was the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Their early records report that in the 1870's prominent members of that group in Portland, Maine, visited the women prisoners and attended court, and in 1877 they employed a paid visitor. Soon one-half of her salary was paid by the city. The next year the city paid her salary in full, and she became a police matron.²

The significance of these early appointments of police matrons is important because they were the first mark of official recognition of the idea that women prisoners should be handled by women.

Chloe Owings, in her book, *Women Police*, traces the history of subsequent appointments of matrons as follows:

Through the efforts of this same organization (referring to the Women's Christian Temperance Union) other cities appointed police matrons in the following order: Jersey City, New Jersey, 1880; Chicago, Illinois, 1881; Boston,

1. These groups included the Chicago Juvenile Protective Association, Cleveland Women's Protective Association, Detroit Girl's Protective League, Girl's Service Club of New York, American Social Hygiene, Cincinnati Social Hygiene Society, Missouri Social Hygiene Association.

2. Reports of Mrs. J. K. Barney, National Superintendent of the Department of Work in Prisons, Jails, Police and Alms Homes. National W.C.T.U., Evanston, Illinois.

Massachusetts, 1883; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; St. Louis, Missouri; Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1884; Detroit, Michigan; Denver, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island; San Francisco, California, 1885; Lowell, Massachusetts; Cleveland, Ohio, 1886.

The Program of the various state and local committees in this department of the National Association was "Push the matter of police matrons in every city; commence at once and continue until successful."

In 1888 the state of Massachusetts passed a law directing the appointment of police matrons in all cities of 20,000 or over. In the same year, due to the efforts of the Women's Prison Association, New York State passed a similar act.³

The earliest appointment of a policewoman, as distinguished from a police matron,⁴ was in 1893, when an appointment made by the Mayor of Chicago, provided for the widow of an officer. Mrs. Marie Owens was carried as a "patrolman" for thirty years, or until her retirement on pension. She visited courts and assisted detective officers in cases involving women and children.⁵

In 1905 in Portland, Oregon, during the Lewis and Clark Expedition, a woman was given police powers to deal more authoritatively and effectively with problems involving girls and young women who were being threatened with poor social conditions and undesirable influences. The woman selected for this work was Mrs. Lola Baldwin whose previous position was that of Secretary with the National Traveler's Aid Association. Her work and its results were so effective, that, immediately afterwards, Portland organized a Department of Public Safety for the Protection of Young Girls and Women. Mrs. Baldwin was the first director of this division. Her incumbency outlasted those of six chiefs of police and five mayors. This Division later became a division of the police bureau by charter.⁶ The women were known simply as "workers" or "operatives" rather than "police."

In 1909, the Florence Crittenton Circle of Grand Forks, North Dakota, advocated the need of policewomen to cope with social conditions contributing to delinquency. Following their request for such appointment, the City Council, in May 1910, passed an ordinance creating the position of police matron. "This position carried with it duties which at present are considered to be in the realm of policewomen."⁷

3. *Women Police*, Chloe Owings, p. 99.

4. Matron usually refers to women who give custodial care. Policewomen carries a broader definition of duties in police work.

5. *Women Police*, Chloe Owings, p. 99 Footnote.

6. *Municipal Police Women*, Sophia Hall, University of Wisconsin Extension Division, Municipal Information Bureau. Information Report No. 22, April 1922, page 14.

7. Mrs. Pearl Blough, Proceedings International Association of Police Women, 1916.

Outstanding among the women whose contribution to the field of women police was invaluable is Mrs. Alice Stebbins Wells, of Los Angeles. She is outstanding because of the manner in which she sought and secured her appointment to the police force, and because, following her appointment, she pioneered under the preventive-protection principles which she had used so effectively in both theology and social work. Besides her work in Los Angeles, she participated in a national movement for policewomen's services and was a leader when the movement had reached its peak. For these reasons, her work deserves particular mention here.

Maude Darwin, writing about policewomen in America pointed out that:

Mrs. Alice Stebbins Wells, a graduate theological student and social worker in Los Angeles, in 1910 of private organizations engaged in protective and preventive work for women and children, would yield more efficacious social results, if these agents were public officers invested with police powers. She accordingly addressed a petition, containing the signatures of 100 influential citizens, to the city mayor asking for her appointment as a police officer.⁸

Mrs. Wells was appointed to the Los Angeles Police Department in the year 1910. Although Mrs. Marie Owens and Lola Baldwin preceded her as far as their work was concerned, one having been a "patrolman" the other a "worker" or "operative" Mrs. Alice Wells became known as the first regularly rated "policewoman."

Commenting on this appointment, the *Bulletin* of the City Club of Chicago contained a statement to the effect that:

Her chief duties comprised the supervision, and the enforcement of laws concerning dance halls, skating rinks, penny arcades, picture shows, and other similar places of public recreation. Among her activities were the supervision of unwholesome bill-board displays, search for missing persons, and the maintenance of a general information bureau for women seeking advice on matters within the scope of police departments . . .

Although ranking with the plain clothesmen, Mrs. Wells was permitted some functions not delegated to the men officers. She was consulted in writing, or in person on the purposes, scope, and possible value of the work of women officers, and was given an office where she was free to keep an office hour.⁹

The position of women police officers in Los Angeles was placed under Civil Service in 1911, and during the latter part of 1912, there were three women officers and three police matrons.

8. "Policewomen and the Work in America," Maude E. Darwin, *Nineteenth Century*, June, 1914.

9. *The City Club Bulletin*, City Club of Chicago, 315 Plymouth Court, Chicago, Illinois, October 31, 1912.

Chloe Owings describes the reaction on the part of the press following the appointment of Alice Wells to the Los Angeles Police Department:

The appointment of Mrs. Wells attracted wide newspaper comment because of the fact that she was an educated woman, a social worker, and had deliberately sought and secured the opportunity to work in a police department. Naturally, many journalists presented the situation in a half-comic manner and pictured the woman police officer in caricature as a bony, muscular, masculine person, grasping a revolver, dressed in anything but feminine apparel, hair drawn tightly into a hard little knot at the back of the head, huge unbecoming spectacles, small stiff round disfiguring hat, the whole presenting the idea in a most repellant and unlovely guise. This conception, however, was not universally held, and many groups of earnest women, searching for a solution of social problems greeted the idea of women police with favor, and Mrs. Wells was soon overwhelmed with requests for lectures and advice.¹⁰

Still active in its efforts to extend the movement for women police service, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, through its president, Mrs. Sara Dow, in 1911, arranged a most extensive speaking schedule. In communicating with Chloe Owings, Mrs. Wells reported that this schedule was carried out to the exact letter. In thirty days, there were lectures in thirty-one cities.

The extension of the movement for women police, and the efforts made in its behalf were bringing results. These results could be seen in the report of the International Association of Policewomen which stated that in 1912, 1913, and 1914, seventy-three cities in the United States and Canada invited Mrs. Wells to one hundred thirty-six audiences.

These cities were located all the way from Dallas, Texas, to Toronto, Canada, and from Los Angeles, California, to New York City. The list of persons and groups who arranged these lectures, included every sort of women's group from the Current Event Class of the Evanston, Illinois, Women's City Club and the Woman's Tax Payer's League of Cincinnati, to the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National Suffrage Association; Baptist, Christian, Congregational, Presbyterian, Unitarian, and Methodist Churches; Councils of Jewish Women, many men's clubs, civic associations, social workers' clubs, various schools and universities, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police, at its meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan. From 1910 to 1915 at least 16 cities had appointed women officers to their police departments.¹¹

The movement for women police had by this time not only extended to positions of "policewomen" but had also made itself felt in several

10. *Women Police*. Chloe Owings, p. 103, Footnote.

11. *Proceedings of the International Association of Police Women*, 1916. Information Report No. 68, New York State Bureau of Municipal Research; U. S. Census, 1918.

cities sufficiently to warrant an executive position. Chloe Owings supplies the information.

At this time (1915) there was at least one woman supervisor of women police in a department; one superintendent of a division of women police; one "senior policewoman"; one inspector; one superintendent of a Women's Protective Division, and even one woman chief of police.

The Mayor of Milford, Ohio, a community of some 1,500 inhabitants, in 1914, appointed a woman chief of police, Mrs. Dolly Spencer. At that time gambling conditions were beyond the control of the Mayor. Mrs. Spencer, who was the general adjuster of all kinds of social problems in the small town, went "after the boys and took them out of the gambling joints to her own home." Here they were joined by their parents. By a series of small raids, she temporarily stopped gambling in Milford. She held her position as chief of police for two years, or until a new mayor took office, when the appointment was not continued.¹²

Various attempts to prevent juvenile delinquency were made by the new women police, such as that reported by the International Association of Policewomen:

Police officer Nellie McElroy, of Rochester, New York, had decided in 1914, that the publicity of court proceedings for girls should be avoided if possible. The responsibility of preventing future delinquency was met by a system of voluntary probation which contained all the elements of official probation. In 1916 at least fourteen cities had instituted a system of voluntary probation by women police.¹³

This method of working with girls carried with it much of the practice which later became known as "supervision." The movement was significant, also, in its recognition of the damage done to children and adolescents in unnecessary court hearings with attendant newspaper publicity.

Policewomen, in the early stages of the movement, found many duties which were not always associated with police work as such, but which demanded a large portion of their attention. "For example, in a community in Iowa in 1916, a woman with police powers handled all cases of women and children involving matters within the scope of police. In addition to this work, she was overseer of the Poor, Truant Officer, Relief Agent, Supervisor of the Garden Club, and Juvenile Court Agent. She had a full-time assistant and the necessary office and clerical help."¹⁴

By 1917, the movement had spread to thirty cities. The greatest impetus followed World War I, when the service was extended to two hundred and twenty towns and cities in the United States. Some of the

12. *Women Police*, Chloe Owings, p. 105.

13. *Proceedings of the National Association of Police Women*, 1916.

14. *Ibid.*

factors which contributed to this expansion were the social and economic freedom of women, their new political status, and their active participation in public affairs. The Law Enforcement Division of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, which was charged with the duty of seeing to it that the environments of training camps were kept free from unwholesome and unhealthy conditions which traditionally surround them, brought out boldly the inadequacy of facilities existing at the time, and the subsequent report of the commission demanded decent detention quarters in communities; the examination of sex offenders, scientific case work, more and better recreation, and proper supervision of commercial amusements and entertainment.¹⁵

Jane Deeter Rippin, in her report of 1918 to the National Conference of Social Work, stated:

The permanent results of the Committee on Preventive Work for Women and Girls, the Section on Women and Girls of the Law Enforcement Division, and the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board cannot be statistically measured. Much of the actual effort which today is directed toward securing women police owes its origin directly to the influence of the activities organized and vigorously fostered and developed by these groups which sought to develop community responsibility through local committees. Through the actual demonstration of case work by trained workers, representative citizens, in many communities learned for the first time of the delinquency which existed in their midst and city and county officials have at least been convinced to some extent that a protective and not a detective program was or might be, effective in the hands of the right women officers.¹⁶

It was at this point that many social workers realized that much of this service lay naturally in the province of the police department. The strategic position of the department as the first line of social defense, was an advantage over the courts and the private social agencies which, in most instances, could not intervene until cases became actually acute.

The distribution and extent of appointments by the various cities, and the states through which these appointments were scattered, indicate the rapidity with which the movement gained recognition between the pioneer development in Oregon in 1905 and the first authoritative book on the subject, published in 1925. The overall distribution was as follows:

Number of States	38
Number of Cities	148
Number of states in which program was introduced in more than one city	27

15. "Woman's Era in the Police Department," Helen D. Pigeon, Executive Secretary, *IA of P Annals of the American Academy*, May 1929, pp. 249-254.

16. "Specific Problems in Camp Communities," Jane Deeter Rippin, *Proceedings of National Conference of Social Work*, 1918.

The distribution of these appointments according to dates is shown in the following listings:

One city	1905	(representing 1 state)
One city	1907	(representing 1 state)
Two cities	1910	(representing 2 states)
Six cities	1912	(representing 4 states)
Ten cities	1913	(representing 9 states)
Ten cities	1914	(representing 8 states)
Seven cities	1915	(representing 7 states)
Nine cities	1916	(representing 8 states)
Thirteen cities	1917	(representing 9 states)
Seventeen cities	1918	(representing 10 states)
Five cities	1919	(representing 3 states)
Seven cities	1920	(representing 5 states)
Nineteen cities	1921	(representing 13 states)
Seventeen cities	1922	(representing 11 states)
Nine cities	1923	(representing 8 states)
Twelve cities	1924	(representing 10 states)
One city	1925	(representing 1 state)

ADMINISTRATION OF WOMEN POLICE WITHIN DEPARTMENTS

Since the inception of women police, several forms of organization with Departments have been tried. In some communities the organization was an outgrowth of special planning; in others it was not preceded by planning, and was therefore fitted into an already existing place. The forms of organization which were most widely adopted and which proved, to some degree to be successful, are listed by Chloe Owings as follows:

- (a) The creation in the police department—in large cities—of a definite Woman's Division, whose work is supervised by one woman director, responsible to the head of the department. In some smaller cities where there are two or more women, one of them, has at times, been given the direction of the work.
 - (b) The placing of all women police in an already existing division, such as that of the detective or special service division, and where their work is supervised by a man officer.
 - (c) The assignment of women police by some directing officer of the department to the different precincts, districts, or departmental bureaus, and where their work is directed by the officer in command.
- Still two other plans have been followed at times: First, that in which the police department has paid in part or full, women working under private organizations and has given them limited police powers and second, the granting of police powers to persons called policewomen, employed by private organizations and who work in conjunction with the police.¹⁸

According to the first plan, a Woman's Division, or a Woman's Bureau, the policewoman in charge, called a Director, Superintendent,

18. *Women Police*, Chloe Owings, pp. 251-252.

or Supervisor, was usually given the same rank and the corresponding salary, powers, and privileges, as the men of equal rank. For example, Elenore Hutzler of Detroit, besides being Director of the Woman's Bureau, was a deputy inspector of police, as was Henrietta Additon of New York. In charge of Women's Bureaus in Cleveland and Portland were policewomen whose rank was that of a Captain. Mina Van Winkle was a Lieutenant while her successor, Rhoda Milliken, has been given the rank of Captain, and the policewomen under her command in supervisory posts, have been designated as Lieutenants, Sergeants, and Corporals, ranks which carry definite allocated duties.

Several cities have given the rank of sergeant to those policewomen within the bureaus who had charge of certain aspects of the work. In general the establishment of a Woman's Bureau has come about through an amendment to the city charter, or an ordinance, defining its functions, the qualifications of its personnel, and the size of the staff, so that changes in the administration would not endanger either its effectiveness or its personnel.

Several reasons have been advanced for the successful work in cities having Women's Bureau or Divisions. These cities include Detroit, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, D. C., Seattle, Portland, Madison, Berkeley, and others. The success of these Bureaus or Divisions can be attributed to such factors as the following: (1) The women in charge have been competent women, highly qualified for their positions along lines of education, experience, executive ability and whose personality and adaptability have brought added merit to the department. (2) Following their appointments, these directors or heads of divisions, have been allowed the opportunity to recruit qualified women, and have been allowed, as well as encouraged by Superior Officers to institute training programs for the women police, which would add to their effectiveness as members of the department. (3) They have been free to organize, develop, and put into operation a preventive program in which prevention is emphasized as a specific function, especially in relation to women, adolescents, and young children.

In spite of the success which has been a logical outcome of such a program, there are very few cities having a Women's Division, as compared to other forms of organization. While there has been little or no publicly organized opposition to such a program, it cannot be assumed that none exists. The fact that so very few cities have adopted this form of organization seems to indicate apathetic response, passive indifference, or reluctance to change an already existing program.

A booklet published recently by the Federal Security Agency contains the following statement:

During the last World War, the women's bureau was the generally accepted organizational pattern, both in theory and practice. Early leaders of the movement almost universally advocated the centralization of all policewomen's work into one bureau, fearing that if the women were dispersed through the various police divisions, a large part of their value as preventive-corrective agents might be lost. These fears seem to have had considerable foundations, as there have been a number of examples of such dispersal which resulted in definite curtailment of the usefulness of policewomen.

The fact that some of the most successful crime prevention work in the country is at present being done by women's bureaus would seem to point to the desirability of some centralization, at least to deal with cases of girls, and women, either within or without the framework of the larger crime prevention units just discussed.¹⁹

As early as 1922, the Police Chiefs themselves seemed to think that a woman's bureau would offer the best type of service. At its Annual Meeting, the Association of Chiefs of Police passed the following resolution:

Policewomen attached to the department shall be under the direct supervision of the Chief of Police as a unit in the department, and where there is a sufficient number, at least one of them shall be a ranking officer in the department.²⁰

From a practical standpoint, each community must decide for itself, after sufficient experiment, study, and research on a city-wide or community-wide basis, whether or not it desires to have its police department remain an agency designed for strictly punitive measures, or whether it desires a police department which has as its objective, not only the maintaining of law and order and the apprehension of criminals, but that is also preventive in character. The tendency at the present time is to attempt, by the use of all the means at hand, to coordinate the two conceptions, thereby making use of all instruments and social studies that are adaptable to the prevention and treatment of crime.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICEWOMEN

The history of the policewomen's movement would not be complete without mentioning the International Association of Policewomen, which had its inception at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections.²¹ Alice Stebbins Wells, only five years after her appoint-

19. *Techniques of Law Enforcement in the Use of Policewomen with Special Reference to Social Protection*, Federal Security Agency, Division of Social Protection, p. 62.

20. *Proceedings*, Annual Meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1922.

21. Now the National Conference of Social Work.

ment in Los Angeles, and spurred by her vital interest in organization, took the liberty and initiative of contacting the Secretary of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. She requested a place on the program in which she and others might present and discuss the subject of women police and their relation to the total program. The policewomen were permitted a place in the conference program and, while in attendance there, they organized on May 17, 1915, the National Association of Policewomen. The first president was Alice Stebbins Wells.

Prior to initiating this organization, she had sought, enlisted, and gained the support and approval of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, which provided assistance in formulating the constitution of the Association, which was patterned after their own organization. The objects of the Association were:

To act as a clearing house for compilation and dissemination of information on the work of women police, to aim for high standards of work and to promote the preventive and protective service by police departments. The suggestions made at the time of the first meeting were:

- (1) Work of women police officers should be largely preventive and protective.
- (2) Need of trained women is urgent.
- (3) Courses of instruction or Institutes of Social Sciences, in Schools of Special Work, with field work in the police departments are needed.
- (4) Proper legislation should be secured for the appointment of women police.
- (5) Women's divisions should be established within the police department and officered by a woman with rank not lower than a captain.
- (6) Careful records should be kept and monthly reports of work should be made to the department.
- (7) Simple civilian clothes of dark color, preferably navy blue, should be worn on ordinary duty; certain special duty might require uniform.
- (8) Exchange of women officers by municipalities would provide for enlarged experience and would make for standardization of work and methods.²²

When the International Association of Chiefs of Police, at its convention in 1922, passed a resolution that policewomen were essential to a modern police department, the movement was given new impetus. For the next few years interest on the part of the public was great and expansion of the service moved quickly.

By 1922, women police had earned a significant place in the field of social work, as is evidenced by the subjects discussed by them in a conference held in Providence, Rhode Island, that year. Discussions covered the work of the women police in cooperation with probation departments and with institutions caring for delinquents; their methods of

22. *Proceedings*, International Association of Policewomen, 1916.

work and their contribution to general child welfare and protective and preventive social measures in relation to delinquency.²³

The International Association of Policewomen, during the years of its activity, contributed much to the general well being of women police, because of its centralized interests, its constant search for better standards, and its desire to correlate the functions and duties within the scope of women police. The central office of the association was located in Washington, D. C. The office provided lecturers, literature of interest to policewomen and, in addition, contributed magazine articles interpreting the work of women police.

England recognized the value of the program when Lady Astor sent for Lieutenant Mina Van Winkle, then its president, to assist the English women interested in saving the principle of women officers in police departments, which was being threatened in the Geddes Report.²⁴

Had the International Association of Policewomen continued to function it is possible that the continued alliance between the National Conference of Social Work and the Women Police would have resulted in a constructive cooperative program. After 1932, the Association was unable to continue. Commenting on this, Captain Rhoda Milliken writes:

The Association was unable to continue service after 1932 when the president who was also its largest financial sponsor died. There is a movement on foot now, to organize a new association with a field secretary who will be able to assist in developing training and recruiting all over the country as well as serve as consultant to individual departments. One of our greatest needs, we feel, is the further development of training and in direction of young people who are good material into the proper channels of training.²⁵

In a communication from the new Chief of the Crime Prevention Division of the Seattle, Washington, Police Department, Captain Irene S. Durham writes,

While I was in Los Angeles I met Mrs. Imra Wann Buwalda.²⁶ She is quite interested in reviving the International Association of Policewomen and so is Captain Rhoda Milliken of Washington, D. C. I also had the pleasure of visiting with her, and she too has plans for the revival of this association.²⁷

23. Survey, July 1922.

24. *Report of the Committee on National Expenditures*, Feb. 12, 1922 (England).

25. Communication from Rhoda Milliken, Director, Women's Bureau, Washington, D. C., May 6, 1945.

26. Consultant on Policewomen, Federal Security Agency, Division of Social Protection.

27. Communication from Irene Durham, Chief Crime Prevention Division, Seattle, Washington, December 12, 1946.

In still another communication, Mrs. Imra Wann Buwalda writes from Pasadena, California :

It is a great pity that the International Association of Policewomen was a "depression casualty." It should be revived or a new one formed. I made some moves in that direction and hope that Rhoda Milliken and some of the rest of you will go on with it.²⁸

The latest group action taken in regard to Policewomen, their services and their potentialities became effective on April 12, 1945, under the National Women's Advisory Committee on Social Protection of the Federal Security Agency. This group, consisting of thirty national voluntary organizations comprising twenty-three million women, passed the following resolution which is appreciative and hopeful at the same time :

Whereas, the qualified policewoman has for thirty-five years demonstrated her ability in helping to prevent the juvenile delinquent from becoming a commercial prostitute, as well as her unique service in removal or mitigation of outstanding environmental "moral hazards" leading to delinquency and crime, through discovery and identification in her case and patrol work and through the presentation and interpretation of them to the community for united action, and

Whereas, there are still rising rates of juvenile delinquency and of crimes committed by women, as well as an increase in rates of venereal disease infections, and a shift from the professional to the amateur "good-time" girl as the major source of such infections,

Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Women's Advisory Committee of the Social Protection Division hereby endorse the program of the Division to aid the local law enforcement administrators in problems relating to the recruitment, training, effective use, and public support of qualified policewomen.²⁹

28. Communication from Imra Wann Buwalda, Pasadena, California, December 5, 1946.

29. Meeting of Federal Security Agency, Division of Social Protection, May 23, 1945, Hotel Statler, Washington, D. C.