

This small town police force operated from home front

By June W. Kennedy
Eagle correspondent

In 1924, Selectman Frank L. Furbush was Chief of Police with 11 special police officers, along with five special officers for the H.E. Fletcher Company. Among the special police officers listed in town records was the name of John F. Sullivan for the first time, being Constable the year before. Some \$2300 was voted for the Police Department that year, but only \$250 was listed in the expenses under salary, which means Chief Furbush only served part-time.

That year the police report stated two men were appointed special officers whose services were to be available at any time. "The work is more than one man alone can handle. However, one grade man should be regularly employed, capable of carrying cases to the Superior Court and directing the work of others."

Some \$3000 was recommended for the year 1926. Chief Furbush worked with Police Officer John F. Sullivan. There were 19 special police officers.

The first report by John F. Sullivan was given for the period from March 15, 1926 to Jan. 1, 1927. The Board of Selectmen in this report stated: "John F. Sullivan was appointed as a full-time officer at a salary of \$1800 per year including transportation. We believe that this plan has worked out very satisfactorily."

The following is a report by Officer Sullivan "for the work of the Police Department from March 15, 1926 to Jan. 1, 1927.... The liquor situation is much improved, but I have been handicapped in my work against auto violations without a motorcycle. Approximately 1500 cases have been investigated and taken care of; \$680 in fines have been assessed at the Ayer Court; \$155.90 have been collected for extra services; \$185 was collected as dog taxes; and \$68 was collected for licenses."

It was in 1936 that the town voted to accept the provisions of Sec. 97 of Chapt. 41 of the General Laws, relating to the appointment of a Chief of Police of the Town of Westford under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Law, and the establishment of a Police Department by the Board of Selectmen. That year John F. Sullivan was elected Constable



Staff photo by Jim Paiva

This house at 11 Boston Road served as the office for the police department when Police Chief John F. Sullivan moved his family there in 1938. Today it is home to the David Myer family.

and Chief of Police.

Under Civil Service, the position became permanent unless charges were brought against the person; until this time the appointment could change from year to year. John L. Connell became the Regular Police Officer.

Also, in 1936, there were 29 special police officers and one police woman, C. Veronica Meagher. By 1938 the budget was \$5490, with \$100 for safety signs; 36 special police officers were appointed. Westford was just beginning its journey in the field of law and order.

Main Street resident John F. Sullivan Jr., in a mid-1970s interview, recalled the days of his youth when his father served as police chief: "My father, John F. Sullivan, was a part-time police officer in Westford from 1923 until 1936, at which time he became Chief of Police. He held that position until his retirement in 1962. During the '20s and '30s, only one or two permanent officers were needed to cover this rural community. There were, of course, many special officers."

"When he began his police work in town, Father lived on Hildreth

'Ambulance service was from the house, but there was no ambulance. The police car was rigged up so that the whole front seat could be removed and a single seat put in place. A stretcher on wheels that folded up was laid in the car from front to back.'

John F. Sullivan Jr.

Street at Dunbell Farm (Charles Hildreth place) across the street from Prospect Hill. He had his own car, but was given money for mileage. I remember that for a while, Dad rode a motorcycle in order to save money. The uniform he wore consisted of navy blue leggings and jacket, cap, badge and knee-length black leather boots.

■ POLICE CHIEF-PAGE 12

Westford Eagle

Early police chief operated from the homefront

POLICE CHIEF-FROM PAGE 5 ■

"In 1938 we moved to 11 Boston Road. The office was located in the front room and it was around-the-clock duty; the calls came to the house. When Dad was out, Mother covered the phone.

"Actually, she took the brunt of the complaints. When a call came, she forwarded it to Lowell; they, in turn, signaled Dad's car. While there was a car radio, the transmit-

ter was based in Lowell.

"Every night until 2 a.m., Father made the rounds about town. While it sounds funny, he had the town mapped out by way of the bars - Caliente on Route 40, the Idle Hour in Graniteville, Wyman's Lunch in Forge Village, and the Elms which was near the Old Oaken Bucket Restaurant. All messages were forwarded to him at these locations.

"In reality, most of the problems

concerned themselves with liquor and licenses. Dad would often tell stories about how he'd hide behind the trees to catch the moonshiners down in Forge.

"Ambulance service was from the house, but there was no ambulance. The police car was rigged up so that the whole front seat could be removed and a single seat put in place. A stretcher on wheels that folded up was laid in the car from front to back.

"Just as soon as an emergency call came, we boys (I was only 15 or 16 at the time) quickly helped Dad remove the seat. At 2 or 3 in the morning, there was no one else to assist. Then it was off to the patient's home and on to Lowell.

"Believe me, sometimes it was pretty scary!"

June Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.