

Ontario Provincial Police

Historical Highlights • 1909-2009

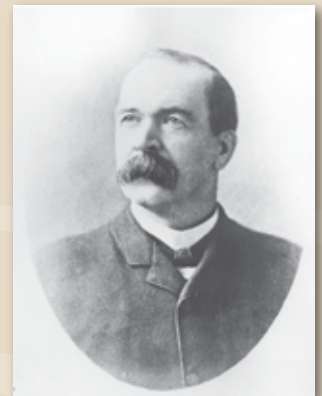


Origins of policing

- Policing, as a professional activity, is a relatively modern phenomenon finding its origins in England, most directly for the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), and in France.
- **1748** Chief Magistrate Henry Fielding raised public awareness about the corrupt state of justice in London, England. He and his brother, John, instituted a full-time force of uniformed men, famously called the Bow Street Runners, to patrol the streets of London and apprehend criminals.
- **1786** British Prime Minister William Pitt proposed legislation in 1785 to provide for the formation of a police force in London. The bill was rejected in England, but enacted in most of its original form in Ireland in 1786, creating the Royal Irish Constabulary.

Policing before the OPP

- **1791** *The Constitutional Act* divided Canada into Upper and Lower Canada. Upper Canada (later Ontario) consisted of just a few settlements. High constables and the constables of the parishes, townships and villages policed the province. These untrained officers received fees for serving warrants, escorting prisoners and attending court. This rudimentary system persisted in rural areas until Confederation (1867).
- **1829** The creation of the first modern police force is attributed to Sir Robert Peel who, while Home Secretary, established the Metropolitan Police in London, England. For the most part, policing in Canada was modelled after Peel's Metropolitan Police although Canada's geography and history necessitated different solutions to policing. Mining, lumber operations and railway construction all created a situation of frontier policing unlike that found in England.
- **1834** The question: "Who formed Canada's first police force?" does not have a clear answer. A security force appeared in Quebec City in 1651 and night watchmen guarded the streets of St. John's, Newfoundland in 1729, but these individuals were not police officers in the modern sense. In 1834, Toronto (then York) became the first town to introduce a full-time paid constable.
- **1865** Near the end of the American Civil War, two small border police forces, the Niagara River Frontier Police (also called Ontario Police and Provincial Police) and Detroit River Frontier Police received salaries and uniforms from the provincial government.
- **1867** This year marked the creation of the Province of Ontario.
- **1868** The Dominion Police Force, a federal police force, worked mainly in Ottawa and eastern Canada. After the Second World War, it was absorbed into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).
- **1873** The North West Mounted Police, eventually called the RCMP, was formed to deal with issues of liquor trafficking, government relations with First Nations, and frontier policing in Canada's west.
- **1875** John Wilson Murray, the first full-time police official for Ontario, relentlessly pursued suspected and known criminals throughout his 31-year career. He detailed his investigative accomplishments in *Memoirs of a Great Detective*, published in 1904.



John Wilson Murray

Early years of the OPP

- **1877** *The Constables Act* created the office of “provincial constable.” Constables served part time and received little training or remuneration. From 1877 through to the formation of the OPP in 1909, fewer than 100 men received appointments.
- **1880** Provincial law enforcement systems were challenged by the unprecedented series of violent events that culminated with the murder of members of the Donnelly family, near Lucan, in southwest Ontario.
- **1884** Joseph E. Rogers was appointed as Ontario’s second provincial detective. A third detective, William D. Greer was added in 1892. Early provincial constables often worked independently, had limited means of transport and only a few had uniforms or equipment.

Early years of the OPP

- **1909** By the early 20th century, there was growing concern about the absence of a unified provincial police constabulary. An increasingly diverse population, the wild mining and railway construction camps in the north and lawlessness along the US/Canada border in the south eventually led the government to form a provincial police force on October 13, 1909. On the first day of its being considered an “active organization,” the OPP was comprised of a superintendent, a senior inspector, two inspectors of criminal investigation, two divisional inspectors and 45 provincial constables. Major OPP duties included investigating serious crime, enforcing *The Games Protection Act*, maintaining peace in mining frontiers, and guarding border points from entry by illegal immigrants.
- **Circa 1910** The first OPP uniforms were issued.
- **1916** The OPP had the difficult and often unpopular task of enforcing *The Ontario Temperance Act*, which required closing all bars, clubs and liquor stores. This act continued until the Liquor Control Board was established in 1927. The OPP continues to enforce many liquor-related laws today.
- **1922** *Amendments to the Constables Act* made counties responsible for their own policing.
- With more than 180,000 vehicles registered to Ontario, the OPP used motorcycles to patrol the highways. The enforcement of *The Highway Traffic Act* would grow to be an important aspect of OPP duties.
- **1922-1939** The OPP underwent major reforms and critical growth. Everything from centralized command to military style procedures (such as Police Orders) to standardized uniforms and equipment helped to build the character of the provincial police.
- Special details such as VIP, Royal visits or major event security provided OPP members with unique experiences throughout the years.



OPP officers in uniform, 1910

The growth of the OPP

- **1939** During the Second World War, the OPP provided special protection to hydroelectric plants and supervised the many volunteer organizations formed to protect the province.
- **1940s** The OPP extended coverage to all areas of the province not served by municipal police forces. *The Municipal Act* of 1944 enabled municipalities to enter into contracts for township policing with the OPP.
- **1941** New marked Chevrolet Coupes replaced the motorcycles of the Highway Patrol.
- **1947** The OPP installed the most modern police radio system of its time.
- **1954-1956** OPP duties involved enforcing *The Highway Traffic Act*. Radar was used in 1954 for the first time in traffic enforcement and in 1956 the breathalyzer was put into service in Whitby, Ontario to identify impaired drivers.
- **1957** OPP General Headquarters moved from Queen's Park to 125 Fleet Street East (later Lakeshore Blvd.), Toronto.



First marked patrol cars in Kenora, 1942

Modern era of the OPP

- **1963** A new era of modernization began for the OPP with a changed command structure supporting the existing 17 police districts. New ranking and promotional programs were introduced, where merit took precedence over seniority. In 1964, all officers of the inspector rank or higher held the “Queen’s Commission” and appropriate training became a top priority for the OPP.
- From the 1970s, specialization in policing has been increasingly reflected in OPP training, equipment and deployment. This has included: bomb disposal; underwater search and recovery; search and rescue; forensics; identification; criminal investigation; public order; aviation services; canine; tactics and rescue; counter- and anti-terrorism work; crisis negotiation; provincial emergency response; and incident command. This development has been mirrored by a steady increase in the civilian membership of the OPP.
- **1974** Women were recruited by the OPP as police officers.
- **1975** After assuming policing responsibility of First Nations peoples from the RCMP in 1974, the OPP supported increasing First Nations autonomy in policing as a step towards a better system for Aboriginal communities in the province. During the next three decades, this led to the formation of the Indian Policing Program, First Nations Program and, more recently, the Aboriginal Policing Bureau.

The OPP today

- **1977** The OPP introduced laser fingerprint detection to the world.
- **1989** All-white cruisers replaced the familiar black-and-white design.
- **1990** During the 1990s, strong community-policing partnerships were established. A new telecommunications system was created.
- **1995** The OPP relocated its General Headquarters to Orillia.
- **2001** The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States had a significant impact on the OPP and changed both proactive and reactive responses to emergency situations. The creation of the Provincial Emergency Response Team (PERT) in 2001, the Provincial Anti-Terrorism Section (PATS) in 2002 and the OPP Security Service at Queen's Park Toronto (2003) positioned the OPP as a leader in emergency management.
- **2005** The Highway Safety Division was introduced as part of a focus on reducing motor vehicle collision fatalities and injuries.
- **2007** The highly visible black-and-white cruiser was re-introduced by the OPP.



OPP laser, 1977

The OPP today

- After a century of policing, the OPP fulfills its mandate as one of North America's largest deployed police services with more than 5,900 uniformed officers including part-time police officers and cadets, over 2,600 civilian employees and over 850 auxiliary members.
- OPP members provide a vast array of services to both the province and more than 315 municipalities, through 165 detachments, six regional headquarters facilities and OPP General Headquarters.
- The OPP serves a province with more than 12 million people and directly polices nearly one million square kilometres of land, over 110 thousand square kilometres of waterways (95% of Ontario's policed waterways) and more than 130 thousand kilometres of provincial highway. Ontario's diversity truly rests with its landscape and its people.
- From forested wilderness and vast lakes and rivers, to rural farmland and dynamic urban centres, the frontiers of policing continue to present exciting challenges to the OPP.



OPP General Headquarters, Orillia



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Front Cover:
Constable A.J. Oliver, circa 1928, 982.1.2