

"The Westminster Police Department in 1929"
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By Jay A. Graybeal

Dealing with crime and punishment were issues long before the founding of Carroll County in 1837. The legislation that created the new county required the construction of a court house and a jail; the latter structure also served as the residence of the sheriff and his family. This elected official was responsible for making most of the arrests and detaining charged or convicted prisoners. By the late nineteenth century Westminster had grown to where a local police force was necessary. An overview of the Westminster Police Department was published in the February 1929 issue of The Police Review:

"While the Westminster Police Department is organized just a little different from most others, the form of organization does not in the least affect its efficiency. Here the mayor is the head of the department. He is the directing head, and the active portion of the department consists of two patrolmen. They work twelve hour reliefs. They alternate between the daylight and night shifts, so that neither is required at any time to be on night duty for an excessively long period.

Arthur C. Bowers began his career as a police officer in 1920 when he first became a member of the Westminster Police Department. Before that time he had earned his living by the sweat of his brow as a painter. He sweats just as much now as before, only his labors are of a different kind and the sweat starts at a different stage of the game. He was a good painter, and he has proven an equally good police officer, else he would not have been retained in the department. Westminster has a habit of demanding the best and is not satisfied with haphazard work on the part of its public officials.

Bowers was born at Union Mills, Maryland, on May 28, 1875, and lived there until he was thirty years of age before moving to Westminster. The new location suited him and evidently he suited the community too, for he has settled down here and judging by appearances, he will remain a citizen of the city until his accounts with life are finally closed.

He is five feet eight inches in height and weighs 198 pounds. He is one who seeks something of variety in life, and likes police work because it affords the widest variety of any employment he has yet been interested in. He likes it too, because it is a 'steady, healthful employment and out among the people.' From that it may be deduced that he is one who likes people and enjoys contacts with them. The people, be it known, also enjoy their contact with him. Friendship begets friendship, and he numbers his friends by his acquaintances.

Charles L. Seipp is the second half of the department. If we were thinking of it in size, he might be a little more than half of it, for he surely has got his growth. He is more than six feet in height and weighs just 245 pounds. It isn't fat either, but solid flesh which is only there in such quantity as will best fit the frame of the man. Yes, he is a full grown man. He has had military experience too in addition to his police experience. He doesn't talk much about his experiences, but we learn that he spent nine months in preliminary military training at Camp Meade. There he learned the necessity of discipline in any organization and therefore, believes thoroughly in discipline for policemen.

He became a member of the Westminster Department in April, 1925 and while he has made a lot of arrests in the three years elapsing since that time, he hasn't yet found it necessary to use force, that is arms or weapons of any kind in effecting the arrest of any of his subjects. His experience, his way, and

his size make that phase of the work easy for him to handle without going to extremes in the application of force.

His former occupation is a little different too. He operated a steam roller. Now that is right particular work, if we can judge by the number and variety of controls we see operators handling. The object of using a steam roller is to smooth out certain kinds of inequalities in the surface being rolled. Perhaps it was from this experience that Seipp got one of his principles. He believes in absolute equality before the law. That is to say, he thinks it isn't right that one person should be permitted to get away with something because of his social, political or economic standing in the community, while the penalty is exacted from others for the same offense. Therefore, in his work, he is absolutely fair and square. He knows no favorites, and as he sometimes puts it in the words of the old saying, "he who dances must pay the piper," and that is all there is to it. Being entirely impartial, he helps to smooth out a lot of the inequalities that sometimes appear in the administration of justice.

He is a congenial, kindly, courteous sort, and is well liked by his fellow citizens and his brother officers." Patrolmen Bowers and Seipp are among many officers who are well remembered by local citizens, including some whose misdeeds resulted in a visit from the men in blue.

Photo caption: Westminster Police officer Arthur Bowers posed on his motorcycle with a sidecar with the members of the Westminster Fire Department in c.1930. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Charles Brown, 1999.