

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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A portrait of a policeman
By Joe Getty

"The police force of this city presented himself for inspection, on election day, arrayed in a fine new uniform, and made a very handsome appearance." – *American Sentinel*, Westminster, November 12, 1892.

The history of police protection in Carroll County is rich and varied. Police departments in our municipalities generally consisted of one-man forces through much of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as displayed by the Westminster newspaper excerpt of 100 years ago.

The Westminster police force was featured in a magazine article in 1929. *The Police Review* was a national magazine published by the National Association of Policemen, Hagerstown. The edition of February 1929 provides a historical sketch of Westminster and biographies of the two patrolmen, Arthur C. Bowers and Charles L. Seipp.

The biography of Trooper Seipp includes information about the structure of the police force as well as personal information:

"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.

"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 has 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.

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"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 these 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."

Seipp was a dedicated officer of the Westminster police force for more than 40 years. In 1946, he was appointed chief of police and served in that role until his retirement in 1965. He died on October 15, 1967.

The role of a small-town policeman included many responsibilities beyond the normal peace keeping duties. For his devotion to Westminster and its citizens, Chief Seipp was recognized by the Westminster Rotary Club with the first Harlow Award for outstanding service to the community in 1959.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: As one of his many responsibilities, Trooper Charles L. Seipp assisted children crossing the street in front of the East End Elementary School.