

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Flock Cameras and Village Security

Flock Safety is a technology surveillance company founded in 2017 by three alumni of Georgia Tech. Based in Atlanta, it produces security devices and systems, including automated license plate readers, gunfire detection methods, and drones, along with software to interpret data collected. Flock products have been beneficial to law enforcement agencies, neighborhood groups, community organizations, schools, businesses, and private homeowners.

The most popular devices are Flock cameras, ALPRs - which capture and analyze vehicle license plates. These solar powered cameras are installed at roadsides, intersections, or entrances to buildings. They take high resolution still images that identify a car or truck's make, model, color, and plate details. Each time a vehicle passes, a photo is taken, and data such as date, time and direction is recorded.



Currently Flock Safety is used in over 5000 cities and neighborhoods in 49 states. Metadata is captured and uploaded to a cloud platform that law enforcement or neighborhood leaders can access. The software compares the plates to a national criminal date base, identifying stolen vehicles or those flagged by other police departments. This creates cooperation as alerts can be shared across jurisdictions. Privacy supporters have been concerned about public surveillance, so Flock has instituted changes, including deleting footage after 30 days, eliminating facial recognition, and limiting control of access rights.

Indian Hill has used Flock technology since 2023. After research, the Rangers proposed the cameras, and Council agreed. Initially 24 ALPRs were installed. Each camera cost \$2,500 annually plus a one-time installation fee of \$600. This price includes hardware, cloud access, and maintenance. If the solar batteries fail, the company will replace them. Currently this costs the Village \$80,000 annually.

The Rangers only use Flock cameras as an investigatory instrument to assist in identifying vehicles. They do not monitor the cameras. They are a post-incident tool. An event occurs and only then can an officer review footage on a street. To query it, a member of the command staff logs into the administrative record, records his name and the purpose of the inquiry. Examples have been “burglary” or “property damage”. The query must be justified prior to doing a search and never includes a name.

The Flock system has helped Rangers solve countless crimes. In one case a burglar alarm went off about 5:00 a.m.; the resident phoned the Rangers to say people were near his garage, and the intruders got spooked and left. Flock was used to pinpoint their vehicle's plate, and it was put on the hot list. Two nights later, the car entered the Village again, and the Flock system beeped. The dispatcher sent officers to the scene, where the thieves were captured at the same site, confessed, and went to jail. Flock was invaluable the past several years when residents were targeted by the South American Theft Group – SATG. It was determined that burglaries were occurring at dusk, so license plates between 5:00 and 8:00 were reviewed. SATG was renting cars in Florida. The Rangers procured information from rental companies to identify, track, trace, and then travel out of state to convict several thieves and incarcerate them. In this effort they had liaisons with the FBI, ICE, and Homeland Security.

The Rangers have been so effective in solving crimes of this international criminal organization that a task force was set up by the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation, whereby agents from Ohio could correlate data in the basement of the Ranger station, leading to better communication amongst police departments. The task force will likely continue through 2026. Often the Rangers' detectives are asked for advice about SATG, as they are known as the hub of successful law enforcement throughout the eastern United States.

Additionally Flock has been used for safety issues. If a person from out of state threatens violence against a family member living in the Village, his vehicle plate can be added to the hot list as a precautionary measure should that car enter this area. Amber Alerts and Silver Alerts can also be tagged to be stopped if in Indian Hill.

Flock cameras have been a force multiplier, allowing the Rangers to become more productive. As Chief Dressell noted, “Nothing has come along that has made more of a difference for investigations than this.” The system has been a game changer for law enforcement and has had a true impact. The Indian Hill Rangers have always excelled, and this tool has made them even better.

Thanks to Chief Mike Dressell for assistance with this article.