Los Angeles was little more than a western outpost when a factionalized nation stopped warring with itself. Replete with wooden sidewalks and gas lamps, horse-drawn wagons stirred the soil as they rumbled through the City’s business district, an area dominated by the suds-slinging predecessors of speakeasies. The LA of 1869 was a dusty infant of a place. Worn low across its tiny hips were six guns, publicly displayed as much for access as for deterrence. This child of a city was growing. So, too, was the lawlessness.

The population had swelled to 5,000, and no longer could a city marshal alone police the four square leagues without assistance. Public drunkenness and a soaring murder rate pushed the city fathers to confront a dilemma of criminality. A paid police force was born. Silver, eight-pointed stars were pinned to the dusters and duds of the first six to serve, their spurs and saddles complementing the lever-action Winchesters of the first known LAPD.

It is from the humblest of beginnings that this, a world-renowned police agency, would evolve. A pioneering spirit has always driven the LAPD, its true strength drawn from its people. Those who have worn the patchless navy blue uniform represent the finest this professional pursuit has ever offered. First in so many regards was this police force: first to hire policewomen, first to form a crime lab, first to form a SWAT capability and many others.

os Angeles police officers safeguarded a constantly expanding jurisdiction with little more than their wits and willpower. For it has always been a case of doing more with less, of the few serving the many and the balance of the police profession looking to the LAPD for the best practices, programs and procedures. It is a documented history of resource-poor cops going above and beyond, all in the name of service, with less, of the few serving the many and the balance of the police profession looking to the LAPD for the best practices, programs and procedures. It is a documented history of resource-poor cops going above and beyond, all in the name of service.
Resources for Research

During the frequent occasions that the Historical Society is summoned to perform research, we rely on a number of documents that are housed on-site. These include annual reports, yearbooks, The Beat magazines and the general files of the Historical Society. Certainly these materials are not all encompassing, but they have proven helpful in the vast majority of situations. Unfortunately, because of the nature, and in some cases age, of the materials, this is not a public archive. Our duties require us to preserve such material, and this unfortunately means access is restricted in order to ensure the material’s viability for future generations.

Of the resources held at the Historical Society, one of the most useful is the collection of annual reports. Either photocopies or actual reports are held on-site dating back to 1895. The earliest ones are scarce, but once they date into the 1911 and beyond, the holdings are nearly complete. Many of these early publications contained a full listing of Department personnel, including hire dates. This has proven useful on many, many occasions. The growth of the City and the Department is also fairly well chronicled in the reports.

Another less frequent but equally useful set of publications are the yearbooks. Police Relief published the earliest one in our holdings in 1911. The balance of these annuals was published by the Los Angeles Police Revolver and Athletic Club. The 1937 Guardian provides a great glimpse into that era of the Department. The same is true with LAPRAAC’s other significant efforts with the 1984 and 2000 yearbooks. All are great sources of information.

For about 30 years, starting in 1947, members of the Department collaborated on a publication known as The Beat. This monthly magazine contained news from most of the stations and frequently featured areas related to the births of children, retirements and Department athletics. The collection of Beat magazines is nearly complete, and later this year, we hope to fill in some of the gaps in our collection.

For research beyond our holdings, the Historical Society relies on the records of the City of Los Angeles. Records from the City Council and the Police Commission have been preserved and are held at the City archives at Piper Tech. The staff of the archives has always proven to be helpful and pleasant for those cases when we have had to examine the City’s records well back into the 1800s.

It is important to know that some of the Department’s historical mysteries can be solved on the desktop. Some on-line resources that have proven helpful can be found through the websites of the Los Angeles Public Library, the University of Southern California (USC) and the Los Angeles Times. The photo collections of USC and the public library have hundreds of police images (visit www.lapl.org or www.digarc.usc.edu to examine these further). News articles dating to 1881 can be found at www.latimes.com.

Collectively, these research tools usually lead us to the answers we seek. A number of inquiries we typically receive, however, cannot be addressed at the Historical Society. We neither have, nor have access to, personnel records. This means that information from an officer’s personnel file (package) will never be found at the Historical Society. We have an appreciation for the state law that renders this information confidential. As such, these inquiries are better suited for the staff of LAPD personnel records.

An officer receives a ride around town while reading an early copy of The Police Beat magazine.
a white shirt and black tie. The coat had a pair of metal grommets affixed to the back, which were used to support the cross-strapped equipment belt. These uniforms were dark blue; motor officers, however, were still wearing olive drab coats and khaki breeches.

The uniform most similar to the current version arrived in 1940. The equipment belt was supported by a cross strap, and the hats were of the eight-point variety. The uniform buttons were gold toned, and no nametags were worn. Ties were required, and the shirts only came in long sleeves. Otherwise, the uniform was very similar to today’s version. White hats for traffic officers were adopted in 1950, and the cross-strap for the equipment belt was dropped in 1958. Nametags were added at the end of 1965. Rank insignia was expanded with the adoption of the career police plan in 1971, leading to the chevrons of FTOs, SLOs and Sergeants II on uniform sleeves.

**Transportation**

For a good portion of LAPD history, the types and numbers of vehicles are listed in the annual reports. Unfortunately, there is no notation of the first wheeled transportation in these documents. In fact, it is listed nowhere in the annals of the Department. Before any type of truly wheeled vehicle was acquired for transportation, there are reports that indicate a wheelbarrow was used to transport inebriated suspects to the jail. While this may have been the unrecorded practice, it seems the first truly wheeled transportation rolled into LAPD service in 1888. This open patrol wagon facilitated the movement of suspects to jail. The following year, an important technical advancement served to protect officers and citizens alike. A wagon with walls and a roof was acquired. This prevented the occupants from spitting and swearing at citizens while housed-bound.

Two-wheeled transportation entered the picture in 1900, when bicycles were utilized to decrease response time. Five years later, the first motorcycles, Indians, were acquired, and in between, the Department’s first motorized vehicle, a 1904 electric patrol wagon was purchased. This vehicle, which travelled at a swift eight miles per hour, doubled as an ambulance, but had no brakes. It was the responsibility of the passenger officer to bring the wagon to a halt in the event the driver was not able to slow the vehicle to a stop. Ten years later, the Flying Squad was founded. Planes weren’t involved, just touring cars utilized for rapid responses to calls for service. With the full integration of motorcycles and vehicles, transportation developments slowed. The first police radios were put in cars in 1931, but two-way communications were still seven years away. This year was an important time for another mode of transportation, the fixed-wing aircraft. An aero squadron was formed to fly planes for the Department. A quarter of a century later, rotary-wing aircraft took to the skies. The traffic nuisances of the 1950s caused Chief William Parker to deploy a Hiller helicopter to inspect traffic conditions with the hopes of pursuing a functional objective: the safe and expeditious flow of traffic. The first helicopter was assigned to

A policewoman, wearing the first formal LAPD uniform for females, queries a young boy.

**Policewomen’s Uniforms**

Although the first policewoman in the nation was hired by the LAPD in 1910, a formal uniform for the ranks of policewomen was not adopted until 1948. Alice Stebbins Wells, Policewoman No. 1, hand-stitched her own uniform from the olive drab wool used in the Department’s summer uniform. The first dark blue uniform was based on those worn by the WAVES of the United States Navy. A skirt, jacket and hat were complemented by a white blouse and a black tie. The required black leather purse had a custom holster for a 2-inch revolver sewn inside. Policewomen also carried their handcuffs, Flashlight, keys, notepad and a street guide along with spare ammo inside the purse. A later version featured a dark blue uniform shirt in lieu of the blouse and jacket. With the adoption of the unisex LAPD uniform, the policewoman uniform became optional for the remaining policewomen.

Patches

Many law enforcement aficionados collect patches and are disappointed to learn that the general population of the LAPD does not wear a uniform patch. For those that do, this history extends to the turn of the 20th century. Officers assigned to horseback sought to distinguish themselves from the other members of the Department as mounted assignment was reason to be proud. The first patch featured a horse head against a background of a spoked wagon wheel. The Mounted Unit was de-commissioned in 1920. The first wheel-and-arrow patch was the insignia of the Speed Squad, a unit that was originally formed in 1909. At this time, the Speed Squad had no uniform, so the patch came along later. The first traffic patch was a winged wheel, surrounded by the words “LAPD TRAFFIC.” The first version of the current traffic patch came about in 1947 and was white outlined with blue piping. In 1974, the patch was modified to add the green cross. The roots of the reserve corps date back to January 5, 1942, when the Los Angeles Auxiliary Police Force was formed. At the conclusion of World War II, this enterprise evolved into the Reserves. The earliest reserves wore a shoulder patch featuring white background and word “Reserve” across the center of the patch. “Los Angeles Police Department” was emblazoned around the perimeter of the patch. In more recent times, Air Support Division added shoulder patches. And now, some specialized units such as Metropolitan Division, Narcotics and Special Weapons and Tactics wear shoulder insignias on their utility uniforms.

**Vintage 1929 Buicks with the first electric patrol wagon, circa 1904 (far left).**

**The Hiller Airship, first used in the 1950s.**

**A variety of uniforms worn by the Department in 1972.**

**A policewoman, wearing the first formal LAPD uniform for females, queries a young boy.**
Transportation, continued

Traffic Bureau. Its value as more than just a traffic cop in the sky was later recognized and more airships were purchased. The first jet-powered helo, a Bell Jet Ranger, is currently on display at the Historical Society. Some other unique forms of Department transportation have also made their way into the Historical Society fleet. The first armored vehicle used by SWAT, a V100, is here; so is the second generation, a Peacekeeper. B-wagons or mass-arrest vehicles like a 1955 jail transport truck and a 1968 B-Wagon are also on display. A couple of retired Kawasaki police bikes have made their way to the museum, and another pair is on display at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

Policewomen

Nearly a full decade before women gained the right to vote in this nation, a pioneering spirit by the name of Alice Stebbins Wells broke into police work. It wasn’t easy. Alice, who was serving the City as a matron, was initially denied her request to become a policewoman. She rallied business people and citizens and ultimately the City Council capitulated. On September 12, 1910, the nation’s first policewoman began serving the City of Angels. By 1911 Alice had acquired her very own manual section, entitled “Woman Police Officer.” Her work to prevent crime by effectively dealing with wayward youth was notable. More notable, though, was her commitment to expanding the role of women in law enforcement.

To do this, Policewoman Wells would raise money, then take a leave of absence from the Department to visit other cities throughout the nation. Her mission was to have other women enter police service by sharing her experiences and the successes she had registered in Los Angeles. By 1914, 35 other agencies had hired their first policewoman. Alice and the LAPD were leading the charge of change. Back at home, that same year saw the LAPD hire Georgia Robinson, the first African-American policewoman in the country. The first policewoman of Hispanic heritage was hired the following year.

The work of the early policewomen, by the standards of women in today’s LAPD, was more associated with social work. Their work assignments were limited to custodial care of women and children, and working with juveniles. This, too, was important work, as juvenile crime posed problems for the City for many, many years.

Although there is evidence that formal training for Policewomen started in 1940, the first acknowledged class of Policewomen graduated from the Elysian Park Academy in 1946. Classes were generally small and segregated by gender; policemen trained separately. Graduating policewomen largely carried out their work without a formal dark blue uniform, until, as previously mentioned, the policewomen’s uniform arrived in 1948. In 1948, policewomen could accompany policemen on the night-watch footbeats. This type of field work only lasted until the following year. Full equality would not be achieved until the Fanchon Blake consent decree of 1980 opened up promotional opportunities and assignments became fair game for both genders.

Stations

As with many municipalities, the formative years of the police department were spent in City Hall. In 1896, the first police headquarters building was established on the south side of First Street, where it stood until 1955. The location of the soon-to-be-completed new headquarters is two blocks east of its predecessor. Of interest to most is when and where the stations were established. Early development included expansion to the University Station and Hollenbeck Heights, which ultimately became the Eastside Police Station housing not just officers, but the City’s population of inmates in the adjoining jail.

Early City expansion meant increased responsibility for the police department. Growth east of the Los Angeles River resulted in the formation of the first substation in Boyle Heights. This was no more than a heated room with a telephone, and in 1889, this served the single officer stationed there suitably. The first fully constructed station outside of the police headquarters was University Division, so named because of its proximity to USC. The division was established in 1905, and its station in 1909. That same year, the City acquired new territory: San Pedro and its police operations, which were run from San Pedro City Hall. East Side Station, which would go on to become Lincoln Heights Division and ultimately the Lincoln Heights jail, opened in 1911.
Prisoners were held in other stations prior to conviction. Sentenced prisoners were housed at East Side. Motor officers were also dispatched from this station. Hollywood opened in 1913, but its first dedicated home was part of the biggest expansion of police facilities. A 1922 bond brought new stations to Hollywood, Wilshire, West LA (or Sawtelle as it was known), the Valley, Highland Park, 77th, Newton, Venice and Georgia Street. While Georgia Street initially functioned as a patrol station, this pursuit was ultimately discarded and Georgia Street served as the headquarters of the receiving hospital system and the home of all functional divisions. The next major expansion was a response to the growth in the San Fernando Valley. This area, which was once serviced from Hollywood division, was subdivided from its headquarters. West Valley broke off in 1957 and North Hollywood opened its doors the following year. Foothill was opened in 1961. Rampart was the next new kid on the block when its doors opened in 1966, and Devonshire took to temporary digs in 1968. Southeast opened in 1978 and Mission in 2006.

**Receiving Hospitals**

Located directly behind the original headquarters building was the first police or receiving hospital. The sick and injured were treated by the medical staff of the police department. All types of cases were treated by police surgeons and police nurses. Some arrived at the hospital of their own accord; others were transported by police patrol wagons that doubled as ambulances. In 1910, the receiving hospital became a department charged with treating those brought to the hospital or the jail, and treating fire and policemen. With the opening of Georgia Street, the system had a dedicated headquarters as well as a new receiving hospital. Throughout time, the system grew to nine hospitals, and the last vestige of the system, Central Receiving Hospital at 1401 West 6th Street, gave way to the new Rampart Station. The ambulances that served the hospitals used the radio designation “G.” The following number generally designated the station from which it was dispatched, i.e., “G-11” would have come from Highland Park. In 1970 the ambulance service was transferred to the fire department, where the field application of emergency medical techniques continues to evolve.

**Detectives**

Nearly 20 years had passed before the Department appointed its first detective. Charles Moffett was the first to conduct investigations, after receiving this assignment in 1888. The following year, at the start of his long tenure as chief, John Glass expanded this function, appointing others, including future-Chief Walter Auble, to conduct investigations. The 1890 Detective Bureau had six members. By 1911, a perception of these men was published in the souvenir annual:

*Only in story books is the detective a strange, one-sided, mental gymnast, with bad habits, who can tell the name of a murderer by sniffing at the cigarette ashes he has left on the scene of the crime. The real detective is a shrewd, zealous, pains-taking, hard-working policeman in citizen’s clothes, who takes great risks at times and who occasionally is a principal in a thrilling man hunt, but who is far more often a very unromantic person simply hanging on to a case until he reaches its conclusion.*

The investigative role in the Department has been one that fluctuated between centralization and decentralization. For much of the early years, detectives were housed at, and responded from, police headquarters. As stations were constructed, small numbers of detectives were housed at the various police stations. Specialized investigations were most frequently run from headquarters. At one time, all detectives were summoned back to headquarters. Later on, they were sent back to the stations. Throughout time, the specialties were separate, then combined—the changes are numerous and the names in some cases are humorous.

The Booze Squad, War Squad, Flying Squad, Gun Squad, Red Squad and Hat Squad, all had special roles in the annals of detective work. The War Squad and Red Squad were charged with tracking down subversives. The Gun Squad dealt with gun-toting rum runners of the prohibition era; the Booze Squad also dealt with bootleggers. The Flying Squad had high-powered 1918 automobiles allowing them to respond to late-night violent crime. The Hat Squad came later; they, too, thwarting thugs in their penal code-prohibited pursuits.

Dating back more than 100 years, the ranking detective often served as the second in-command of the Department. This was true in the time of Walter Auble, himself ascending to the chief’s job from the rank of captain of detectives. Thad Brown, the long-serving chief of detectives was Chief Parker’s number two. Brown’s extended tenure in this position is unlikely to ever be surpassed. It was during this era that detective work was promulgated by one of the Department’s greatest supporters, Jack Webb. His portrayal of Sergeant Joe Friday, a skinny-tied workaday detective with a monotone approach to life, brought fact-based cases into the living rooms of anyone with a TV tuner.

**Investigations of Note**

Throughout the 140 years of the Department, many, many investigations have been conducted by members of the Detective Bureau. Here are some of the more prominent:

1910 - Bumbing of the Los Angeles Times building
1922 - William Desmond Taylor murder
1925 - Hellman bank robbery and murder of Officer Wylle Smith
1927 - Kidnapping and murder of Marian Parker
1947 - Elizabeth Short murder (Black Dahlia case)

1960 - Red Light Bandit (serial rapist Caryl Chessman)
1963 - Murder of Officer Ian Campbell (Onion Field)
1968 - Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy

1968 - Officers stand guard outside Good Samaritan Hospital, where Robert F. Kennedy underwent surgery and subsequently died after being shot by Sirhan Sirhan at the Ambassador Hotel.

1969 - Manson murders
1969 - Black Panther shootout
1974 - Alphonse Busier
1974 - SLA shootout
1977 - Hillside Strangler


1994 - Nicole Brown Simpson murder
1997 - Ennis Cosby murder
1997 - North Hollywood shootout
and the murders of many, many Los Angeles Police Officers.