

Tidbits from Our Interviews: Police Work Back in the Day...

Posted on [April 16, 2012](#) by [admin](#)

In December 2011, The OHP highlighted one of their interviews, "Police in Greenwich," narrated by James (Jimmy) Norton Hirsch, Jr. This is a fascinating transcript with lots of great details about police work in Greenwich over the years. Another interview, detailing the history of police work in our town, was conducted in 1975. The narrator is John Gleason who began his tenure in 1930 and went on to become Chief of Police. Both of these interviews present not only interesting historical information, but also very colorful vignettes about the nature of police work in Greenwich in those days. Gleason, for example, tells of racing to crime scenes in taxis and of hailing a truck on the Post Road because there were only one patrol car for the entire force. Police in those days often took trolleys to get to the crime scene. Later, speeding violators or those trying to escape the law were apprehended on motorcycle. This was before patrol cars became the norm. His colorful stories also include breaking up bootlegging operations during Prohibition. Today we all know about "following the money" to get to the source of crime. Back in Gleason's day, the Feds and the police "followed the sugar" – massive bulk purchases of it – to get to the source of illegal liquor. After the stake out and the raid, the stills would be destroyed and the contents poured out into nearby streams. The bottles were also smashed with axes where they were found.

As it turns out, one of our Oral History Project interviewers was discussing these transcripts with a Call-A-Ride driver, who just happened to be a retired Greenwich policeman. Here's the story she tells of that conversation:

"The mention of the Social Register and Dinner Set Gangs reminded the driver that there had been a series of less publicized robberies in Riverside one winter. The robberies occurred during daylight hours, when the residents of the houses were absent, so that the police were not notified until some hours later. The only clue was the footprints in the snow outside the window which had been forced open. The police took casts of the footprints, noting that the tread of the boots was unusual. The case remained unsolved for several months. Then at a social event, a fellow police officer in Westchester described a series of robberies, mentioned that there was a suspect, but no evidence. Because the M.O. had been the same in both sets of robberies, the Greenwich police obtained a warrant, searched the room in which the suspect was living, and found a pair of boots which had the same unusual tread on the sole, and which fitted the cast. Case solved! As the C-A-R driver said, 'How often could you expect something like that to happen?'"

There are a million great stories out there. At the Oral History Project, we track them down one at a time.