

Ontario Provincial Police Historical Overview 1909-2009

Origins of policing

Policing, as a professional activity, is a relatively modern phenomenon finding its historic origins in England and in France.

1748 Chief Magistrate Henry Fielding raised public awareness about the corrupt state of justice in London, England. He and his brother, John, instituted a full-time force of uniformed men, famously called the Bow Street Runners, to patrol the streets of London and apprehend criminals. In an interesting observation for the time, John Fielding asserted that, *“it is much better to prevent even one man from being a rogue than apprehending and bringing forty to justice.”*

1786 British Prime Minister William Pitt proposed legislation in 1785 to provide for the formation of a police force in London. Although the Bill was rejected in England as a “threat to the liberty of the individual and an unnecessary encroachment upon personal freedom,” Ireland enacted it in most of its original form. In 1786 this Bill passed, laying the foundation for the Royal Irish Constabulary.

Policing before the OPP

1791 The *Constitutional Act of 1791* divided Canada into Upper and Lower Canada. Upper Canada (later Ontario) consisted of just a few settlements.

1793 Parliament passed legislation enabling the appointment of high constables in each of the four districts of the province. They received no pay for their work. Counties came into being in 1849 employing constables who worked alongside those of the parishes, townships and villages. These untrained officers received fees for serving warrants, escorting prisoners and attending court. This rudimentary system persisted in rural areas until Confederation (1867). By the mid-1880s these largely untrained and unpaid citizens had been replaced by paid town, city and county constables.

1829 The creation of the first modern police force is attributed to Sir Robert Peel who, while Home Secretary, established the Metropolitan Police in London, England. On Sept. 29, 1829, one hundred men began policing the streets of London. For the most part, policing in Canada was modelled after Peel’s Metropolitan Police, although the unique circumstances of Canada’s geography and history necessitated different solutions to policing. Mining towns, lumber operations and railway construction all created a situation of frontier policing unlike that found in England.



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1834 The question: “Who formed Canada’s first police force?” does not have a clear answer. Although a security force appeared in Quebec City in 1651 and night watchmen guarded the streets of St. John’s, Newfoundland in 1729, these individuals were not police officers in the modern sense. In 1834, Toronto (then York) became the first city to introduce a full-time paid constable. Police forces were formed in: Quebec City in 1838, Hamilton in 1840, Montreal in 1843 and Ottawa in 1855.

1865 Near the end of the American Civil War, two small border frontier police forces, The Niagara River Frontier Police (also called “Ontario Police” and “Provincial Police”), and Detroit River Frontier Police received salaries and uniforms from the provincial government.

1867 This historic year marked the creation of the Province of Ontario.

1868 The Dominion Police Force, a federal police force, worked mainly in Ottawa and eastern Canada. After the First World War, it was absorbed into the RCMP.

1873 The North West Mounted Police (NWMP), eventually called the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), was formed to deal with issues of liquor trafficking, government relations with First Nations, and frontier policing in Canada’s west.

1875 John Wilson Murray, hired by the Attorney General years before the creation of the OPP in 1909, became a central figure in provincial police history. The first full-time police official for Ontario, he relentlessly pursued suspected and known criminals throughout his 31-year career. Murray recorded his investigative accomplishments in *Memoirs of a Great Detective*, published in 1904. John Wilson Murray helped define the beginnings of modern criminal investigation in Ontario.

1877 *The Constables Act* created the office of “provincial constable.” Constables served part-time and received little training or remuneration. From 1877 through to the formation of the OPP in 1909, fewer than 100 men received appointments.

1880 Provincial law enforcement systems were challenged by the unprecedented series of violent events that culminated with the murder of members of the Donnelly family, near Lucan, in south western Ontario.

1884 Joseph E. Rogers was appointed as Ontario’s second provincial detective. His first major tasks were to quell drunken behaviour in railway construction camps, control bootlegging along the rail lines and deal with unruly miners in northern Ontario. A third detective, William D. Greer, was added in 1892.



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1877-1909 Early provincial constables often worked independently, with limited means of transport and only a few had uniforms or police equipment. Between 1877 and 1909, approximately 100 men worked for the Attorney General as provincial constables throughout Ontario.

1898 John Moodie imported the first gasoline-powered car, the “Winston,” into Canada from the United States.

1903 After the discovery of silver in the Cobalt area, the local population skyrocketed. This was paralleled by a growth in lawlessness and it became imperative to establish a police presence in this dynamic, rapidly expanding community.

1905 George Caldbick moved from Toronto to Cobalt in this year to take up work as a “provincial constable,” his appointment pre-dating the formation of the OPP. By 1909, more than 100 mining properties were in operation in the Cobalt area. The other early Ontario frontiers along the Niagara and Detroit rivers and the U.S./Canada border also required police presence to deal with illegal aliens and the unlawful trade of liquor over the border.

1907 Temporary constables were appointed to enforce *The Automobile Act*.

Early years of the OPP

1909 By the early 20th century, there was growing concern about the absence of a unified provincial police constabulary. An increasingly diverse population, the wild mining and railway construction camps in the north and lawlessness along the U.S./Canada border in the south eventually led the government to form a provincial police force on Oct. 13, 1909.

On Jan. 1, 1910, the first day of its being considered an “active organization,” the OPP was comprised of a superintendent, a senior inspector, two inspectors of criminal investigation, two divisional inspectors and 45 provincial constables. This “permanent force of salaried police constables” became an important part of the unique character of the province of Ontario.

1910 At the beginning of January, the OPP's administrative structure was announced and the list of detachments or “stations” (as they were then called) was published. These stations were often staffed by only one officer. Major OPP duties included investigating serious crime, enforcing The Weapons and Games and Fisheries Act, maintaining peace in mining frontiers, and guarding border points from entry by illegal immigrants.



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1910 During his term of office from 1909-1921, Superintendent Rogers created standards for the new police force. These included the stipulation that the men would possess the ability to read and write, be of good moral character and devote their entire time to constabulary duties. The payment of salaries was to replace the practice of constables accepting fees or gratuities. The new code of behavior required constables to be “civil and attentive to all citizens” and forbade insolence, untruthfulness and unnecessary violence.

Circa 1910 The first OPP uniforms were issued.

1912 Disturbances broke out among striking gold miners in the Timmins-South Porcupine area and all available provincial police travelled to the area to help restore order under the supervision of George Caldbick, now an inspector, who directed one group of officers working out of South Porcupine. The other group, led by Albert Boyd of Toronto, was headquartered at the Goldfields Hotel in Timmins. Police presence was required for nearly a year. Some of the earliest known photographs of the OPP were taken during these events.

1917 Inspector William H. Mains of Niagara Falls recommended that a bicycle be purchased for a constable that, in his own words would “...save considerable horse hire.” Members of the newly formed OPP were often left to their own devices for transportation. They walked, rode horses, used the railroad, paddled canoes or travelled in winter by dog sled and snowshoe.

1914-1918 The First World War created major changes for many nations and greatly shaped the twentieth century. By 1921, 79% of OPP officers were veterans of this catastrophic war. Michael O’Leary and Collin Fraser, veterans awarded the Victoria Cross (VC), became OPP officers. The VC, the most prized decoration in the Commonwealth, is awarded for “most conspicuous bravery or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy” (Veterans Affairs Canada).

1916 The OPP had the difficult and often unpopular task of enforcing *The Ontario Temperance Act*, which required closing all bars, clubs and liquor stores. This Act remained in force until the Liquor Control Board was established in 1927. The OPP continue to enforce many liquor-related laws today.

1921 Commissioner Major General Harry M. Cawthra-Elliot was appointed first commissioner of the OPP. He reorganized the police force by dividing the province into nine districts, each commanded by a district inspector. The OPP’s headquarters was on the second floor of the Parliament Buildings in Toronto. This was just the beginning of a transformation of the force into a paramilitary organization.



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1922 The new commissioner retired in 1922 because of ill health. At the time of his retirement, the OPP had 72 uniformed officers, seven civilians and 50 liquor law enforcement officers on the payroll. Amendments to *The Constables Act* made counties responsible for their own policing. With more than 180,000 vehicles registered in Ontario, the OPP used motorcycles to patrol the highways. The enforcement of *The Traffic Act* would grow to be an important aspect of OPP duties.

1922 A disastrous fire spread through the Temiskaming District resulting in 45 deaths. This resulted in the arrival of 24 OPP officers who established a police detachment and distributed food, supplies and equipment.

1922-1939 Commissioner Major General V.A.S. Williams introduced measures still in use today. His establishment of *Standing Orders* (also known as *Police Orders*) proved influential and provided the members with a common sense of identity. Williams undertook the military conversion of the Ontario police, introducing foot drill, regular inspections of standardized uniforms and equipment and military courtesies such as saluting.

1923 The province assumed responsibility for roads in the southern part of the province, including 1,800 miles of provincial highways. Since lawbreakers also had discovered the utility of the automobile, the OPP established a motorcycle patrol in 1924.

1924 OPP air service was inaugurated.

1925 OPP constables travelled on a gasoline driven “speeder” which ran on railway tracks from Cochrane to Hearst, and finally to Larder Lake in pursuit of a fugitive.

1927 The Ontario Department of Highways Motorcycle Patrol numbered 70 officers. These officers were transferred to the OPP in 1930.

1929 The Ontario Provincial Police Training School was established based on a military model.

1930s During the Depression, Ontarians suffered social and economic hardship for many years. These conditions presented particular challenges for Ontario’s police officers including the policing of relief camps and a large transient population, managing labour and social unrest as well as dealing with a range of criminal activity typical to any society. The birth of the Dionne Quintuplets in 1934 excited the imagination of Ontario and the world. As wards of the Crown, they received security protection from OPP provincial constables. Special details such



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as VIP, Royal Visit or major event security provided OPP members with unique experiences throughout the years.

Growth of the OPP

1939 William H. Stringer became commissioner at the outbreak of the Second World War and served until 1953. After two decades of military leadership, Stringer was a “policeman’s police officer” who moved from provincial constable to the highest ranking position. To promote efficiency and morale, Stringer established a coordinated training plan and a system of commendation for outstanding service.

Security of the province during wartime was a top priority. To cope with the demands for manpower during the war (many OPP constables enlisted in the armed forces) and in order to guard hydroelectric facilities, bridges and border points, hundreds of volunteers were organized in the *Veterans’ Guard* and the *Ontario Volunteer Constabulary*.

1940 The OPP extended coverage to all areas of the province not served by municipal police forces. In 1944, *The Municipal Act* enabled municipalities to enter into contracts for township policing with the OPP.

1941 New marked Chevrolet Coupes replaced the motorcycles of the Highway Patrol.

1944 *The Municipal Act* enabled municipalities to enter contracts for township policing with the OPP.

1945 The fleet increased from 205 cars in 1945 to 399 by the end of 1949.

1946 Strikes were seen by the government as major disruptions to vital economic wartime activities and to the subsequent post-war rebuilding of the economy. As such, the OPP were often called upon to maintain the peace. For example, in July 1946 the United Steel Workers of America went on strike at the huge Steel Company of Canada in Hamilton. Attorney General Blackwell sent 214 provincial police officers (more than one-third of the entire force) to the city. Officers were accommodated at the navy barracks at H.M.C.S. *Star* for forty days. The strike was over by early October.

1947 The OPP installed the most modern police radio system of its time.



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1949 Harley Davidson motorcycles were reintroduced for patrolling the province's highways by the OPP. In the same year, the OPP commissioned their first two cabin cruisers.

1953 A strike by gold miners in Porcupine lasted for over seven months. Additional provincial police were called in to assist the local detachment.

1954 The establishment of the Ontario Police Association was supported by Commissioner Edwin V. McNeill (1953-1958) who brought first-hand experience and understanding of the challenges faced by the OPP's rank and file. To reduce the number of traffic collisions on the roads, and as part of an overall traffic safety campaign, the OPP introduced radar machines to force motorists to reduce speeds. It was first used operationally on the Queen Elizabeth Way, west of the Humber River Bridge, in 1954.

1956 The breathalyser was put into service in Whitby, Ontario to identify impaired drivers.

1957 In the 1957 OPP Annual Report, the OPP identified 238 detachments of which 173 were "regular" detachments as opposed to municipal contracts. Of these detachments, 45 were still staffed by only one constable and a further 39 staffed only by two or three men. Administrative support (such as clerk-stenographers and transport personnel) was becoming increasingly important. In 1957, 161 clerical employees served the OPP. The adoption of a Teletype system greatly improved communication between detachments and headquarters. OPP General Headquarters moved from Queen's Park to 125 Fleet St. (later Lakeshore Boulevard East), Toronto.

1958-1963 During Commissioner Wilfred Hamilton Clark's tenure (1958-1963) the government improved its police training by taking over a former air base at Aylmer where the new Ontario Police College was established.

1962 The government created a Police Commission to oversee the OPP and other police services in their fight against organized crime.

Modern era of the OPP

1963-1973 The only civilian to ever be appointed commissioner was Eric Silk, Q.C. A former assistant deputy attorney general, Silk brought his considerable talents to bear in reforming the OPP and preparing it to meet 20th-century challenges. Over the course of a decade he introduced broad and wide sweeping changes. To modernize the OPP and improve professional standards, he initiated a new promotional program and command structure based on examinations and



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performance ratings, as well as oral reviews. The OPP also launched a cadet program for recruits who wished to join the force.

Silk also changed the visual identity of the OPP symbolized by the re-design of the shoulder flash, still familiar to people today. Specialized courses were developed for the OPP College and for field members through in-service training programs. The changed command structure supported the existing 17 police districts. New ranking and promotional programs were introduced, where merit took precedence over seniority. Motorcycle patrol officers received training and a select number of this group became the new Golden Helmets precision motorcycle team.

1964 All officers of the inspector rank or higher held the “Queen’s Commission” and appropriate training became a top priority for the OPP.

1965 The first three OPP canine handlers began training, marking the beginning of specialized disciplines within the force.

1970 The OPP provided immediate assistance at what was, to that point, the most demanding emergency in the history of the OPP. Carrying 100 passengers and a crew of nine, the Air Canada “California Galaxy” flight crashed at Toronto International Airport on July 5, 1970. There were no survivors.

1970s Specialization in policing was increasingly reflected in OPP training, equipment and deployment. This has included: bomb disposal; underwater search and recovery; search and rescue; forensics; identification; criminal investigation; public order; aviation services; canine; tactics and rescue; counter- and anti-terrorism work; crisis negotiation; provincial emergency response; and incident command. The growth in specialization has been mirrored by a steady increase in the civilian membership of the OPP.

1973 The OPP assumed leadership over policing in First Nations communities in northern Ontario. In order to police remote communities, the OPP acquired a de Havilland Beaver aircraft. This was the beginning of the North West Patrol. This year also saw the creation of the Ontario Government Protective Service (OGPS). Special constables were hired specifically to provide security at the Queen’s Park complex, the Parliament Buildings, Osgoode Hall and at OPP headquarters.

1973-1981 During Commissioner Harold Hopkins Graham’s tenure, the OPP improved its policing capacity with the purchase of two Bell Jet Ranger helicopters (a new Bell 206-L Long Ranger helicopter was added to the OPP air fleet in 1978 to replace the Jet Ranger OXX which crashed in 1977) and the acquisition of two mechanical robots to handle explosive devices.



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1974 Fifteen female recruits joined the OPP in 1974, the vanguard of many who have subsequently made their mark as part of the rank and file of the Ontario Provincial Police. The OPP's waterway policing fleet consisted of ten launches and 54 skiffs.

1975 After initially assuming policing responsibility for First Nations communities from the RCMP in 1974, a cost-sharing agreement with the federal government in 1975 paved the way for OPP involvement in equipping and training Aboriginal special constables. Over the past three decades, the OPP has supported increasing Aboriginal autonomy for self-policing within their communities. These activities have been administered from the OPP Indian Policing Program, First Nations Program and, more recently, the Aboriginal Policing Bureau. In response to the threat of terrorism and high-risk situations such as hostage takings a specially trained team, the Tactics and Rescue Unit (TRU), was organized in 1975.

1976 The North East Patrol Unit was established at South Porcupine and equipped with an Otter aircraft to patrol the James and Hudson Bay coasts.

1977 The OPP introduced laser fingerprint detection to the world.

Early 1980s During James Laird Erskine's brief term as commissioner (1981-1983), larger detachments of the province came under the command of inspectors for the first time. These officers commanded a detachment many times larger than the entire police districts of earlier years. The OPP became a major influence among police forces by providing a standard of excellence that many police services strove to emulate.

1984 During Commissioner Robert Archie Ferguson's term of office (1983-1988), the OPP celebrated its 75th anniversary. To commemorate the event, the organization adopted the motto "*Proud of our Past, Preparing for Our Future.*" In the same year, the OPP's official history was published. At this time the OPP's strength numbered 5,400 members. The visit of Pope John Paul II, as well as various Royal visits, presented significant security and organizational challenges for the provincial police; challenges which the OPP more than met.

1980s Police efficiency and connectedness to Ontario communities improved with the added promotion of the "Neighborhood Watch Program."

The OPP on the move

1989 All-white cruisers replaced the familiar black-and-white colour scheme of the OPP cruiser.



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1990s Commissioner Thomas B. O'Grady (1988-1998) initiated a number of modifications to make the force increasingly responsive to the needs of a changing society. One of these involved strengthening "Community Policing Principles" to encourage the development of police-community partnerships designed to create services consistent with the needs of the *whole* community. To make the OPP more representative of Ontario's population, O'Grady began a campaign to encourage recruiting women as well as individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and Aboriginal communities.

1990 A new telecommunications system was completed.

1991 The OPP received delivery of two new Aerospatiale AS 355F2R twin-engine helicopters. The new machines came with the advantage of two engines, allowing for flight over water and night flying, and a greater fuel capacity.

1995 The OPP relocated its General Headquarters to Orillia.

A secure Ontario

1998 Gwen M. Boniface (1998-2006), a lawyer and adjunct professor at the University of Western Ontario Law School, brought outstanding credentials to the position of commissioner. Serving for eight years, Commissioner Boniface made significant contributions to policing particularly in the areas of biker enforcement, child pornography enforcement, First Nations policing and to the field of justice as a member of the Law Society of Upper Canada.

1999 The purchase of a Pilatus PC 12/45 plane saw the expansion of Aviation Services by allowing the OPP to operate and perform missions anywhere in Ontario, as well as provide aid and services anywhere in North America. The newly created Incident Support Centre was utilized to prepare the OPP for the dawn of Y2K, which arrived and passed without incident.

Turn of the century The OPP's preparations for the millennium proved more than adequate. By the turn of the century, the OPP's services ranged from providing day-to-day policing in more than 400 towns, cities and rural communities to supplying the province with emergency services and specialized criminal investigation expertise, and to targeting crime on a global scale.

To respond to public concern, the OPP focused on rural crime prevention, which helped to bring declines in property crime. The OPP's continued commitment to increased road safety also helped to reduce the number of road fatalities.



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2001 The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York had a significant impact on the OPP and changed both proactive and reactive responses to emergency situations. The creation of the Provincial Emergency Response Team (PERT) in 2001, the Provincial Anti-Terrorism Section (PATS) in 2002 and the OPP Security Service at Queen's Park, Toronto, (2003) positioned the OPP as a leader in emergency management.

2005 The Highway Safety Division was introduced as part of a focus on reducing motor vehicle collision fatalities and injuries.

2006 Julian Fantino was appointed Commissioner of the OPP on Oct. 30, 2006, after serving the province in public safety for 42 years, including the roles of Commissioner for Emergency Management (2005), Chief of the Toronto Police Service (2000-2005) Chief of York Regional Police (1998-2000) and Chief of London Police Service (1991-1998).

2007 With a nod to the organization's strong roots, he re-introduced the highly visible black-and-white cruiser in 2007 and initiated the return of the blue-on-blue peak cap in 2008/2009. Frontline policing and uncompromising public service have been Commissioner Fantino's key priorities. Law enforcement, traffic safety and preserving the peace, along with crime detection, prevention and reduction are but a few of the fundamental elements of the OPP's public service mission.

The OPP today

- After a century of policing, the OPP fulfills its mandate as one of North America's largest deployed police services with more than 5,900 uniformed officers including part-time police officers and cadets, over 2,600 civilian employees and over 850 auxiliary members.
- International border enforcement and intelligence units, specialized services for municipal police, provincial emergency response and joint forces operations have re-emerged as critical priorities amongst general law enforcement duties.
- OPP members provide a vast array of services to both the province and more than 315 municipalities, through 165 detachments, six regional headquarter facilities, and OPP General Headquarters.
- The OPP serves a province with more than 12 million people and directly polices nearly one million square kilometres of land, over 110 thousand square kilometres of waterways (95% of Ontario's policed waterways) and more than 130 thousand kilometres of provincial highway.



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- Ontario covers an area larger than France and Spain combined. Its lakes and rivers occupy one-sixth of the total landmass. The OPP's land, air and marine units all play a critical role in helping officers do their job.
- Ontario's diversity rests with its landscape, its people and its stories. From forested wilderness and vast lakes and rivers, to rural farmland and dynamic urban centres, the frontiers of policing continue to present exciting challenges to the OPP.

