

## History of the Delta Police

The history of policing in Delta is closely tied to the development of a viable law enforcement presence in British Columbia.

In the summer of 1858, following the Fraser River gold rush, James Douglas, the first Governor of the colony of Vancouver Island, took it upon himself to administer the mainland area then known as New Caledonia. Douglas appointed a Robert Smith as Justice of the Peace for the area and one William H. Ladner as the first Constable. Governor Douglas moved, in the fall of 1858, to establish a police force based at Fort Langley. The forerunner of the B.C. Provincial Police, the force was established primarily to administer and police the gold fields and as such the duties of the members reflected the role of administrator rather than law enforcement. In 1871 when the colony of British Columbia joined the new Dominion of Canada, the B.C. Police became the British Columbia Provincial Police.

William Ladner subsequently went on to found the community of Ladner's Landing, the hub of what was to become on November 10th, 1879, the municipality of Delta. The years between 1868 and 1877 saw much of the land in Delta claimed and by 1879, upon incorporation, the infrastructure of the fledgling municipality was in place. The first municipal council consisted of the Reeve and six councillors together with the Municipal Clerk.



*First Municipal Hall and Jail*

There was no official police presence during the early years in Delta, however, on August 20th 1887, William McKee, the Municipal Clerk, was designated by council as a Constable, his new

duties to be in addition to those of Clerk. One wonders what the Clerk's reactions were because the following summer council approved the appointment of a part time Constable at the salary of \$75.00 per month. On July 7th 1888, Joseph Jordan was appointed as Delta's Constable.



Over the period of the next 8 years Joseph Jordan was dismissed and re-appointed several times. He was assisted from time to time by other "temporary" Constables. It is interesting to note that it wasn't until July, 1891 that council approved the purchase of revolver and badge for their Police Constable.

The early years in Delta, particularly around the communities of Ladner and Port Guichon, were of a "frontier" nature. There was a significant Chinese population living in West Ladner between the downtown Ladner core and Port Guichon and the area known as Chinatown was a hotbed of gambling, prostitution and opium addiction. Council was quick to reap the benefit from a potential income source, as an 1885 council ledger listed 2 revenue sources as:

- 6 month licence for an opium vendor - fee: \$25.00 (not prescription druggist)
- 6 month "privilege" licence for the smoking of opium - fee: \$5.00 each smoker.
- Typical charges from the Magistrates bench book of the day were:
- Maggy a Cape Mudge Indian charged with being in a house at Ladners Landing on the 28th inst. for the purpose of prostituting.
- Ah Chong and Ah Shin charged with running and operating a game or games of chance in a public place, on the evening of the 12th inst.
- Subject charged by officer Jordan with theft on Tuesday evening the 11th. Stealing a box of hams the property of Mrs Green to the value of \$7.50

There are other charges relating to drunkenness, assault, tax evasion, game laws, farming and fishing.

The police office as such was housed in the Municipal Hall at the intersection of Elliott Street and Chisholm. The single storey clapboard building was located next to a storage shed, between the two buildings was the gaol with a frontage of no more than four feet.

Joseph Jordan, designated Chief Constable, was by 1900 working full time in his position. He retired in 1911 after 23 years intermittent service as Delta's first policeman.

In 1912, the Municipal Hall moved from its original location at Elliott and Chisholm and relocated to what is now the Delta museum. The police office and gaol were in the basement. The following 11 years saw 8 men fill the position of Chief Constable and little is known about them or their tenures except that one was dismissed for relieving the municipality of \$106.00. During this time the municipality suffered economic set backs as the salmon fishery on the river began to wane

hastened by the Great War of 1914 - 1918. There was hardship amongst the cannery workers, however the general population continued to grow but at a much slower rate.

In January, 1923, Special Constable Scott Fenton was appointed on the instructions of the Reeve to investigate the theft of logs. The following month he was appointed as Delta's regular Police Constable by magistrate John McKee.



Fenton was to remain the Chief Constable of Delta for 28 years. He retired in 1951 for health reasons but returned six months later as Clerk/Constable. In 1953, Scott Fenton was appointed Police Magistrate, a position he held for a number of years.

The salary paid to Chief Constable Fenton on his appointment was \$140.00 per month, out of which he had to supply his own vehicle, a Model T Ford with curtains, and pay for the running expenses. In 1938 the council agreed to supply the Chief with a car, however it was not until 1944 that all operating expenses were picked up by the department. Scott Fenton was the only full time Constable for many years, however in 1931 council authorized the appointment of a night policeman at a salary of \$80.00 per month, this officer was responsible for patrolling Ladner and his pay was partially paid for by the area merchants.

There were several night patrolmen over the years but the most noteworthy was Alfred "Spud" Dennis, he served from 1937 to 1949. "Spud" like some of his contemporaries today, seemed to attract heat, he got himself into several "situations" and was shot at 3 times during his 12 years service.

Following Scott Fenton's resignation in January 1951, Jack Hallett became Chief. Hallett had joined Delta in 1949 as a replacement hiring, he was an ex R.C.M.P. and Canadian Provost Corps member and was no doubt selected for his prior experience. Hallett's term was quite short, just over two years, but during his tenure he instituted one major innovation, a Motorola radio system was purchased for the department. The system initially consisted of a base station and two mobile car units and was installed for a cost of approximately \$2,500.00. The system, though no doubt innovative for its day, had limited range. The reception in Ladner was fine and Tsawwassen was quite good, however there was no reception either way in East and North Delta. The capital expenditure for the equipment in 1950's dollars must have been quite significant and probably reflects Hallett's political savvy. It is interesting to note that in today's dollars \$2500.00 would purchase a comparable CB or even superior VHF system.

Jack Hallett was also responsible for changes to the members' uniforms. He introduced full tunics in sea green colour with Sam Browne belt and holster, again no doubt a consideration of his R.C.M.P. and military past.



*First Police Station in basement of Municipal Hall*

During this period, a name familiar to many older members of the department appeared on the roster of Delta Police officers. Terry Brennan, who later became Deputy Chief Constable, was hired in April 1952. A former member of the Manchester City Police in England, Cst Brennan quickly began to exert his influence on the department.

On May 1st, 1953, Mel MacKay (no relation to the ill-fated Ron McKay) was appointed Chief Constable at a special meeting of the Police Commission. MacKay was not promoted from within the ranks of Delta members, but was brought in from Surrey where he had been the Municipal Licence Inspector. A former member of the B.C. Provincial Police and the military, he had served as a penitentiary guard and Surrey police constable, a position he held until the municipal policing was contracted to the R.C.M.P. in 1951.

Chief MacKay's term was for just over 3 years and he resigned rather suddenly for "personal reasons" in June 1956. However, during his tenure, two more members were added to the department bringing the establishment to six: Chief, Deputy Chief, Sergeant and three constables. It is worth noting that the N.C.O. rank of Sergeant first appeared at this time. Scott Fenton, who had taken the position of Clerk/Constable shortly after his resignation as Chief in 1951, was appointed Magistrate in the summer of 1953 and his replacement as Clerk/Constable was Mervyn Smith who later became Delta's second longest serving Chief Constable.

The March 1956 police budget, approved just prior to MacKay's resignation, included the addition of another member. The budget for \$34,000.00 also included funding to provide police service to Annacis Island. The property, within the municipality of Delta, and accessible only from the New Westminster side of the Fraser river had been purchased by the titled Grosvenor family

from the U.K. and was being developed as an industrial park. The island patrol required the additional hiring of three more constables and the purchase of an additional police car.

Given the relative size of the island and its development at that time and the "substantial" policing assets assigned to its protection, it is clear that Council was committed to protect its tax base.



In June, 1956, Merv Smith was appointed Chief Constable and Terry Brennan made his Deputy. That year saw 5 new members hired including Leonard Cornell. Len, who, until his illness and passing in the summer of 1991 was a familiar face to many members when he stopped for coffee and a chat in the department lunch room. The same year also saw Deputy Chief Brennan assigned as the OIC criminal investigation, another Constable, Don MacDonald, later to become the C.I.B. Inspector, was sent on the fingerprinting course and Chief Smith purchased some ex F.B.I. photography equipment for use by the department. Clearly as the department expanded it was following the classic police model of an early generalized patrol function leading to increased specialization and sophistication.

In the summer of 1957, the department responding to increasing calls for service, began operating the police station on a 24 hour basis. Prior to the round-the-clock duty office, calls at night were taken by the Ladner telephone exchange operator who was responsible for dispatching the graveyard shift member. The same year saw the introduction of school talks on bicycle safety, the tenuous beginnings of the present day School Liaison program.

Perhaps the single most influential factor on the future of the Municipality of Delta, and by association its police department, was beginning to take shape at the northern edge of the municipality. The Deas Island road tunnel, later to be named after the Ladner resident and long time lobbyist George Massey, began construction in 1957. Completed in May, 1959 and opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on the 16th July the same year, the tunnel directly led to the population of Delta increasing from under 14,000 to over 72,000 in less than 20 years. The initial rate of growth for the municipality was not significant through the early 1960's, however by the end of the decade the population growth in all areas of the municipality except the East and West Delta farmlands was explosive.

By 1960, the rank structure of the department had begun to solidify and the incremental Constable ranks were as they are today: Probationer, third class, second class and first class. The rank of Corporal was also in use although the equivalent position of Detective did not make an appearance for another 20 years and then it was subsequent to the retirement of Chief Smith.



*Police Station 1962*

January 1960 saw a general pay increase, raising salaries to the following levels:

- Probationer Constable "\$300.00" per month
- Third Class "\$340.00 "
- Second Class "\$385.00 "
- First Class "\$420.00 "
- Corporal "\$440.00 "

The same year, the Delta Municipal Police Association was formed to look after the interests of the police members.

Open to the Constables and N.C.O.'s the association was a union and a vehicle for social and recreational events. The association was established primarily through the efforts of George Angus and Ron McKay. Both men left their marks on the face of the Delta Police, George Angus as the 14th Chief Constable and Ron McKay as the only Delta Police member to give his life in the line of duty.

By 1971, the department had 45 sworn members, the increased size of the police force reflected the phenomenal growth of the municipality but with the built in lag endemic to municipal planning. The year before in 1970, Council had begun examining possible sites for a new police and courts complex. A number of locations in Ladner were looked at, and, with input from Chief Smith, the present site alongside the Municipal Hall was chosen. The building was ready for occupancy by the beginning of 1972.

Along with the burgeoning population rode a rapidly rising crime rate. Statistics from 1972 show that over the 10 years since 1962, the population had grown from 16,000 to 57,760 and the number of sworn members had risen from 15 to 50. Criminal Code offences went from 344 to 3,060, traffic offences from 685 to 3,557 and motor vehicle accidents from 181 to 909. Another problem that began to appear with ever increasing frequency was drug abuse. The use of

marijuana and its derivatives increased rapidly as the age of Aquarius began to affect the social fabric of the youth. As with most young people throughout the western world at that time, protest and anti-establishment activities were exciting and appealing, unfortunately so was the liberal use of drugs. Heroin, L.S.D. and other hallucinogens were showing up in Delta in ever increasing quantities.



*Police and Court Building 1972*

Further specialization within the department was also occurring in the early 1970's. A School Liaison Officer operating on a full time basis was established in 1972. Targeted initially at the elementary schools, talks were given on bicycle and general safety. By 1978 there were two members, and, in 1981 the present system of an Officer in each of the 4 high schools serving their feeder schools was in place. A four man canine section was established in 1973, although it was disbanded a year later due to high operational costs.

There had been no attempt to standardize training for the Delta members since the mid 1950's when Chief Smith took office. It was the norm for experienced members to be hired and they learned the local procedures on the fly. When members were hired without experience they were sent to the Vancouver Police Academy for training. However, as the department maintained the high levels of hiring through 1973 it was decided to implement a departmental training program.

In July 1973 the 7 recruit members of Delta Police Class #1 took a three week training course at the police station.

Ernie Doyle was the training officer and was to remain the officer in charge of the subsequent three classes at what was to become the Delta Police Academy located at the Boundary Bay Airport.

The final, and largest class, number 4, lasted 15 weeks and had 21 graduating members. The B.C. Police Commission assisted with the costs of the training programs and provided certification for the course.

The Provincial Government of the day wished to standardize police training, and, to that end, the B.C. Police College was established in 1975 at the Seaforth Armories on Burrard Street in Vancouver. The provincially run facility took over responsibility for the training of Municipal Police Officers in the Province. The Police College was later to move to Jericho hill in Vancouver where it became the B.C. Police Academy and part of the Justice Institute.



*Delta Police Class 1*

At 6.10pm on November 2nd 1974, an incident began to unfold in Tsawwassen that would shake the Delta Police and its members to the core. A Mr Heggs was at the Shell gas station in Tsawwassen sitting in his car when a black Lincoln driven by Elery Steven Long, a 29 year old local career criminal, drove onto the lot. Long got out of his car and appeared to be trying to cause trouble by being abusive towards Mr Heggs and the gas station attendant.

Long approached the Heggs vehicle and after passing some comment, reached into the car and grabbed Heggs around the neck. The driver wound up the window causing Long to grab the driver's door window which he pulled until it shattered.

Further words were exchanged during which Long indicated he had a revolver or pistol in his Lincoln. Long then left the gas station lot in his car. The attendant called the police.

Csts. Stabler and Painter were dispatched to the gas station on a "man gone berserk" call. They soon established that Long was the suspect in the damage and as he had threatened the lives of members before, S/Sgt Ron McKay attended the scene to take charge. After a brief conference, S/Sgt McKay got back into his vehicle and drove directly to the Long residence, parking the police car in the driveway. The other members, Csts. Stabler, Ingram and Christie followed, Cst Painter had already left looking for Long. The members saw their N.C.O. get out of his vehicle and walk to the front door with his hands in his pea-jacket pockets. As the officer began to climb the three steps to the front door he was stopped by Long who was carrying a sawn-off shotgun in his right hand. Long put his left hand on McKay's pea-jacket and was began shaking him, the shotgun was pressed against the officers stomach. Long was shouting at McKay demanding what the officer was doing on his property. This interplay lasted less than a minute followed by a slight pause when nothing was said. Cst. Stabler heard a muffled blast, he saw McKay begin to slump forward, his hands still in his pea-jacket pockets. Long pulled the shotgun away from the S/Sgt McKay and pointed it in the direction of the other police officers. They all jumped for cover as Long fired again then went back into the house. The members at the scene did not have chance to return fire before Long had disappeared.

At 11.15pm that same day, Long turned himself in to the Vancouver City police. He was subsequently charged with murder punishable by death and on the 27th May, 1975 he was sentenced by Mr. Justice Munroe:



Accused to be taken to the prison from whence he came and there kept in close confinement until the 12th day of August, A.D. 1975 when he shall be taken to the place of execution where he shall be hanged by the neck until he is dead.

Long was never to face the noose, his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, thanks to the moratorium on capital punishment, the legacy of the Federal Attorney General of the day, Warren Allmand.

S/Sgt Ron McKay was buried in Boundary Bay cemetery on Thursday, November 7th, 1974 with a police honour guard in attendance. A lone piper, Duncan Fraser played a lament as final tribute to the slain member. The funeral was the first turnout for the fledgling Delta Police Pipe Band.

Over 300 police members from across Canada and the United States were in attendance at the memorial service held in the Ladner Community Centre. Ronald Edward McKay was 47 years old.

As the year 1974 closed, the establishment of the force stood at 70 with a fleet of 16 vehicles and serving a population of approximately 60,000. Following the death of S/Sgt McKay the department experienced considerable public support, this was to last for the next few years and Delta experienced a relatively quiet period as the headlong population growth began to slow.



In April 1980, Inspector Doug MacLeod of the Vancouver City Police was named the new Chief Constable, Inspector George Angus was appointed Deputy Chief. Chief Macleod soon expressed his desire that the department become more community oriented, he also stated an intent to modernize the force and bring it into the 1980's. One early plan of his was to develop a viable North Delta Sub-Office, and expand the existing police station in Ladner. The sub-office has been available for many years but only now are realistic plans in the works to expand the existing facilities at police H.Q.

During the early 1980's the department experienced a period of growth as the establishment rose from 93 sworn members in 1979 operating 25 vehicles, to 121 members in 1982 operating 33 vehicles. The members attached to general investigations or C.I.B. were originally all Detective Constables except for the N.C.O.'s in charge. That changed with Chief MacLeod who followed Vancouver's practice of making the position of Detective equivalent to that of Corporal.



In the late summer of 1985, Chief MacLeod became ill and after a lengthy period away from work he took an early retirement for health reasons. Deputy Chief Angus became the acting Chief and was confirmed in the rank on the 23 October, 1986. Inspector Harry Berekoff was promoted Deputy Chief.

George Angus's term was to be a short one as he had agreed to postpone his planned retirement pending the selection of a new Chief.

April 1987 saw the appointment of the incumbent Chief Constable. Patrick Wilson became the 15th Officer to hold the position for the Municipality of Delta.



A native of Parksville B.C. he joined the R.C.M.P. in 1953 and served on the force until his appointment to Delta in 1987. Chief Wilson saw the first 16 years of his service on the prairies in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 1970 he was transferred to R.C.M.P. Headquarters in Ottawa to take charge of management training for the Force. In 1973 he was appointed Senior Instructor to the R.C.M.P. Training Academy in Regina. In 1976 he received his commission and was appointed Personnel Officer of the Academy. At the time of his resignation from the R.C.M.P. Chief Wilson was Officer in Charge of the Maple Ridge detachment.

The new administration soon began to implement changes to the operational face of the department. Both personal and operational equipment was upgraded as was the decor of the police building. A new division, Support Services, was created with a Staff Sergeant in charge. The department consisted of an autonomous Traffic Section and Corporal, a trimmed down Canine Section with three members and their dogs, and the newly named Community Relations section made up of the School Liaison and Crime Prevention sections.

Task Force, a part of the C.I.B. or General Investigation Division was also created. Made up of Constables drawn from the operational platoons and headed by a Corporal/Detective, the section was quick to become an effective counter to the increasing number of property crimes, particularly B & E's. Other sections within the department were also reorganized for a more effective response. Additional recruiting was authorized by council in 1989 to make up for the establishment of the new specialized sections, a total of nine new members were hired, including an establishment increase of seven.

The decade closed with an air of optimism and a positive feeling of direction, the police station and its personnel took on an measure of professionalism and purpose that was not lost on the community.

*.....to be continued.*