

Protect and Serve



A History of the Modern Police Department in
Alstead, NH
1957-2018

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By Penny Gendron

Early American law enforcement was modeled after the English system of sheriffs and constables and New Hampshire was no exception. Besides officials to enforce the law, social organizations often cropped up to meet specific needs of the rural communities. Beginning in 1866, Alstead and Langdon founded a Thief Detection Society, whose goal was to catch thieves and reimburse any member who had suffered losses. The Society met on Saturday nights, elected officers and chose “pursuers” and also had a member act as a prosecutor. Until just after the turn of the 20th century, this social group met in a town hotel and had chicken pie suppers, besides pursuing those who perpetrated larceny. With the advent of modernization, crime changed and naturally, it changed the protection of citizens and the pursuit of criminals. Eventually, the Thief Detection Society became purely a social group and like many small towns in the United States, Alstead elected Constables as peace keepers, relying on them to respond to calls and accidents, deal with juvenile and domestic issues and occasionally chase down some “bad guys”. As time progressed, the need grew for even more formalized law enforcement for the town and through the latter part of the 20th and early 21st centuries, the department expanded and modernized under the guidance of the first four Chiefs of Police.

In 1957, Erwin Ward was voted into his first term and together with Constable Willard Kelley, they relied on an operating budget of \$150.00 per year to fund law enforcement for the town. The next year, Kelley was replaced by Vernard Tuttle. Elevated to Chief Constable, Ward took his leadership position seriously; answering calls and picking up speeders, resulting in a budget overage of \$63.80. At this point, police expenses were incurred by paying a wage of \$1.00 per hour while on duty, plus reimbursement for mileage of .06 per mile and toll calls. It was traditional and expected that he would utilize his personal vehicle to answer calls and then be reimbursed for mileage. A Keene Sentinel article in 1967 reported that when he began his job, Chief Constable Erwin Ward was issued “One pair of handcuffs, Six Badges, Twelve Riot Batons and Twelve Helmets”. No mention was made of a gun and when questioned about this recently, he remembered that he had a .32 caliber revolver that Erma Burton had given the town, but he preferred to use his own weapon, a .357 Magnum.

For the year 1958 the budget for the Police Department had been raised to \$250.00 but according to the Annual Report for the Town of Alstead, due to “increased happenings in this town during the year, an unavoidable overdraft was realized in the Police Department”, an overage to the tune of \$116.80 or almost 47%! While going that much over budget traditionally would have resulted in a reprimand or not being re-elected, the Town of Alstead clearly supported their constables because they doubled the budget to \$500.00 for the year 1959.

In 1961, the problems and concerns of the citizens of Alstead that required police department action were not so vastly different from the issues that arise today. While some problems of 2018 have the added dimension of drugs, the majority of calls that the current department have paralleled the early 1960’s and included domestics, petty larceny, automobile accidents, speeding vehicle complaints, drunken disturbances and unruly youth. Selectmen

requested patrols to be made on Friday and Saturday nights during the Summer months to try and curb some of the latter behavior. Police calls had increased for the town and surrounding area to the point that Constable Ward discussed with the Selectmen the possibility of purchasing a two-way radio for his vehicle to better communicate with other law enforcement officials. They approved the purchase, but since no money had been allotted by the voters for this expense, Ward bought the radio personally. The radio communicated with Dispatch Center in Keene (now Cheshire County Dispatch) thus making it possible to be in contact with the State Police, Sheriff's Department, Conservation Officer and Fire Mutual Aid, increasing safety for Constable Ward and other officers in the area.

Some time during the year 1966, Erwin Ward approached the Selectmen and expressed his concern that some of the citizens were not pleased when he pulled them or their family members over for motor vehicle violations or pursued them for legal infractions. He was concerned that the problems and issues of the Town of Alstead, as with most of New Hampshire, had reached a level where constables, elected on what basically amounted to a popularity contest, were no longer sufficient to enforce the law. Ward requested that there be a Chief of Police appointed or hired to do the job, rather than rely on the public to choose a person to do an increasingly difficult job that was requiring more skills and training. The Selectmen appeared to agree, for the year ending 1966, while two Constables were listed in the beginning of the Annual Report, the Report of the Police Department was signed by "Erwin Ward, Chief of Police". The role of the other constable, Mr. William Hall, seemed to have taken on the duties of the Dog Constable. By 1967, the Police Department budget reflected the enlarged police presence in the town, increasing to \$1000.00 and then the next year ballooning to \$1500.00! By 1970, the department, led by Chief Ward, no longer utilized elected constables. The reformed department

handled 222 calls, ranging from accidents, vacant house checks and animal calls to larceny, juvenile complaints, domestics and even escorting a band of gypsies through town. He was assisted by Dale Dustin and five special officers when needed, Richard Stanley, Dale Wilson, Francis Stevens, Lawrence Taylor and Leslie Greene. Ward noted in his annual report for the department, it “seems that each year the complaints received by the local police department exceed that of the year before and each year the nature of the complaints become more serious and involved.” He speculated that this was due to the number of transient residents during the summer months, the growing use of drugs and the reluctance of the courts to “hand down punishments that are harsh enough to discourage the potential law breaker”.

At the same time that he was a constable, then chief, for the Town of Alstead, Ward worked full-time in security at Fellows Gear Shaper and also served as an auxiliary State Trooper for the State of New Hampshire, a firearms instructor and a Boat Inspector; many of the trainings that he attended were necessary for those positions and also greatly benefitted his hometown. During the course of the decade, Ward attended several trainings to enhance his law enforcement skills, among them an FBI training, Crowd Control (sponsored by the NHSP) and Automobile Accident Investigation, but it was not until 1973 that he became a Certified Police Officer by the State of New Hampshire, after attending classes at the Vo-Tech in Claremont, NH. Prior to the early 1970’s, an officer’s training was based on his or her departmental requirements, as opposed to any uniformity of statewide training. In comparison to some constables from surrounding towns, Ward’s additional training enhanced his level of competency as a police officer.

By 1972, Chief Ward was still utilizing his personal vehicle for police calls, he was being reimbursed at a rate of .10 per mile (racking up 2,493 total miles for the previous year), however

given the increased need for police presence, Ward requested that the town provide the department with a cruiser. Recently in an interview, the former Chief shared some stories of the use of his personal vehicle while on duty. Most notably, he recounted the time that he had tried to stop a driver who had forced another driver off the road. A highspeed chase ensued up River Street with Ward getting close enough to read the first two digits of the license plate, however the right rear tire pulled away from the rim on his car causing the vehicle to swerve. He lost control, went over an embankment, rolling three times and ending bottom side up in the river. The roof of the car was crushed to the seats and Erwin maneuvered out the narrow windshield opening. After crawling up the river bank, he recalls looking back and seeing the roof light, detached but still going and hearing the Mutual Aid Dispatch Center trying to call him on the radio. He vowed that he would get the driver that got away, and tragically two years later, Ward investigated a fatal accident on Hatch Hill and discovered that the deceased driver was the man who had eluded him previously. Needless to say, by the early 1970's the volume and nature of the calls in Alstead had escalated to warrant the necessity of a Police Cruiser versus a personal vehicle. On the Town Warrant articles for 1973, for the first time, the voters were requested to raise and appropriate \$1800.00 toward the purchase of a Police Cruiser. Total cost of the cruiser was to be \$3800.00 with the balance of matching funds to come from a limited time Federal Grant. At the Town Meeting, the purchase was approved and in the Annual Report for 1973, Chief Ward reported that a "1974 Plymouth Fury with a Forest Green body and White roof" had been ordered and the Police Department was awaiting delivery.

Following the purchase of a cruiser and getting a budget increase, Ward underwent more extensive formalized training, rather than the haphazard training he had been picking up throughout the years. In 1973, he attended a 54-hour course at the Claremont Vo-Tech School

sponsored by the NH Police Standards and Training Council (mandatory for full-time officers, but not part-time) and each year he availed himself of trainings offered by the State of NH and the Sheriff's Department. Ward firmly believed that police needed to be up to date on training and qualifications and openly advocated for it.

As the decade progressed, Chief Ward's Town Reports detailed his increasing frustrations with the increasing crime yet lack of manpower/resources. He indicated that Selectmen, Firemen and Police Officers were all in the same position, they were not in it for the money, but were "civic minded people who are all open to harsh criticism and ridicule, but each of us have to do the best we can with each situation at the time it confronts us." Ward continued to urge the citizens of Alstead to be proactive by taking note and reporting anything unusual or out of the ordinary immediately, thus trying to prevent some of the criminal situations in our town. Despite the apparent hindrances to the Chief and his part-time officers serving the community, Ward seemed to keep his sense of humor about his supposed "part-time" job, one year inviting the readers of his annual report to "spend a typical weekend" with him to see what his duties may involve. His narration began at 2:00 AM Saturday morning with a frantic long-distance phone call from a woman who needed a message delivered to a relative vacationing for a week at Lake Warren. The woman had no idea who owned the camp or on which side of the lake it was located, but he was able to find the family and deliver the message. Later in the morning, after finishing a Vehicle Identification Number check, Ward was dispatched by Mutual Aid to an automobile accident where he discovered there was personal injury. Observation of the driver responsible for the accident resulted in a DWI arrest and transportation to Keene for a breathalyzer, which was positive and therefore, meant there would be a future court date that Ward must attend. Later in the afternoon, a burglar alarm went off at a residence and when he

responded, Ward discovered that the family had arrived for the weekend and forgotten to turn it off. Routine patrol on Saturday night followed by a report of vandalism and domestic complaint on Sunday rounded out the weekend of “part-time” work. The Chief always gave credit and thanks to the State Police, Sheriff’s Department and other local agencies for their continued assistance to him and his other officers.

During the decade of the 1980’s, Ward continued to serve the town of Alstead in his part-time capacity as Police Chief, utilizing a series of part-time officers to assist him. According to the 1983 Town Report, the town purchased a new police cruiser and had three men who filled in with some hours. They were David Peltier, Ken Avery and Russell Mason and all attended the New Hampshire part-time officer’s training program in Concord, thus becoming fully certified by the State. Gone were the days of electing a town’s law enforcement or merely “deputizing” responsible citizens, a new age had come for small town policing in a modern litigious society. Previously for many years in the Town Reports, the Chief had campaigned for standardized training and beginning March 1, 1984, the Attorney General and the Police Training Council had approved a new 78-hour Part-Time Officer’s Certification course (Full-Time Officers were already mandated to attend State training). In 1986, Chief Ward used his annual report, not only to update Alstead on the number and types of calls, but to inform the citizens of his ongoing frustrations encountered in his job:

“Times have changed, and policing in a small community has changed also. Changes in societal attitudes within the past two decades have resulted in changes in law enforcement. Some of the “old ways” of dealing with the criminal element in society and the enforcement of law and order are no longer acceptable. In the “old days” we used to do police work 80% of our time and paper (sic) 20%. Now we do paperwork 80% of the

time and police work 20%. All too often an arrested person will be released before the paperwork is finished! ...A police officer must be professional and must be fully trained in law enforcement procedures, as well as firearms training. There is no room for error in this world of lawsuits.”

After 30 years serving the community, Chief Erwin Ward had a new police cruiser, trained part-time help and select boards that supported him in his endeavors to grow and modernize the department. He recognized, however, that continued growth would be expensive for each small-town department and in paralleling the regional school district, Ward floated the idea of a regional police department; one fully staffed and equipped police department to service multiple towns. He detailed his thoughts about the consolidation in the 1989 Town Report, in which he called for a study to look into which towns might be interested and how the cost would be divided. In a recent interview, he reiterated his support for this idea, although he recognized that given the logistics of sorting out the finances between towns, it would probably never become a reality.

On a more realistically achievable level, Ward requested that the Police Department’s office move out of his home to its own quarters. With the relocation of the Town Offices from the Fire Station/Town Hall to Bragg Lane in 1991, that vacated space became the new office of the Police Department. In that year’s Police Department Report, the excitement for the Ward household was summed up in a few words, “the time had come when “mother” wanted access to her own desk and the privacy of her own home without intrusion”! The privacy and convenience of a secure location could not be denied.

The next major change to Alstead’s department occurred on May 30, 1994. After serving the town for eleven years in a part-time capacity, David Peltier became its first full-time,

Monday thru Friday officer. This temporary mid-year change came at the request of Chief Ward and with the hearty support of the select board, led by Chairman Jim O'Brien, Betty Woodell and Mike Rogers. For Town Meeting 1995, Article 10 requested that the voters approve the position to become permanent, with the second cruiser to be provided through Article 9, a gift of a 4-wheel drive vehicle from the late Roger Canfield. Both articles were passed and Alstead entered the next level of police coverage. This advance to incorporating a full-time officer with a part-time chief came on the heels of a February 1994 tragedy in Walpole, NH whereby the police chief shot to death a selectman, then later that day, took his own life and a similar catastrophe involving town employees during 1993 in Newbury, NH. According to a Keene Sentinel article in April 1994, in reference to these events, Chief Ward was quoted as saying "with all this stuff that's been going on, it's time we got into the 20th century" ... "it's time to start building the department up". He looked forward to the day, hopefully soon, when he felt that the department was in a position where he could retire as the chief and let younger hands take the reins. The burden to the taxpayer for increased police presence and protection did not come cheaply, between 1994 and 1995 the Police Department budget increased by 65%, from \$27,859 to \$42,814. 1994 also brought another leap into the 20th century for the Police Department with the acquisition of its first computer, donated and set up by Dan Curll II, making the processing of reports, forms and cataloging of data easier and more efficient.

As the decade and century came to a close, the department experienced some personnel turnovers that delayed Ward's retirement; in quick succession, Peltier resigned, replaced by Ernie Bashaw in 1998, Ken Miller in 1999 and Joseph Murray in 2000. In 1988, Erwin had left Fellows Gear Shaper's employment and was hired full-time with the Cheshire County Sheriff's Department, which he retired from in April of 1998. Finally, in a July 9, 2001 letter to the

Alstead Selectmen, Chief Ward stated that he would retire on August 17th, leaving Sergeant Joseph Murray in charge. When asked recently what he felt had been his greatest contribution or legacy to the Alstead Police Department, Erwin did not hesitate when he replied, “to get this town its own police station and a cruiser”. After years of running the department out of his home and using his own car for calls, he best understood the necessity of a separate station for privacy and professionalism and a cruiser for safety and liability issues.

To better ease the town through this transition and responsibly replace their long-term chief, the select board appointed a committee of townspeople to gather information as to what the needs and wishes of the town were with regard to a police department. According to the 2001 Annual Report, the Alstead Police Department Committee determined that the residents wanted a highly visible police presence in the community, who could respond to their calls promptly. While recognizing that the administrative work and training was burdensome, yet necessary, the committee’s recommendation was for the department to increase in order to meet the needs of Alstead. That increase was for a full-time chief, supported by a full-time officer and a part-time assistant, the latter to help with the administrative work load in order to allow the two officers more time for other duties. They also recommended that a Warrant Article be placed on the ballot to purchase a 2002 Ford Explorer for use as a second police cruiser, as the one previously donated in 1994 was “tired and unreliable”. The committee justified the necessity of a competently trained department, the warrant article for a new cruiser and the proposed budget increase of \$55,000, by pointing out that in “a society increasingly beset with lawsuits against towns, selectmen, and police officers based on false arrests, excessive force, and negligent hiring, training, supervision, and retention of police personnel”, it is a financial increase that we

(the town) “should be willing to accept to have a reasonable amount of protection and security for our families, friends and neighbors.” Thus, ended the era of Erwin Ward, who transformed Alstead’s law enforcement as life changed in New Hampshire and the United States from the 1950’s with elected, part-time constables utilizing personal vehicles and equipment to the 21st century with highly trained, full-time officers utilizing marked cruisers, computers and body armor.

Despite the committee’s report in 2001, the department was understaffed for nearly a year while a search was undertaken to fill the positions. Sergeant Joseph Murray was in charge and he hired Michael Milano as a part-time officer, but the quest to find a full-time chief did not end until July of 2002, when Christopher Lyons was selected to fill the position. The difference between an older, home-grown, part-time chief and the younger, out-of-state, full-timer could not have been more disparate. Whereas, Erwin Ward knew most of the townspeople (and their parents) and Chief Lyons was an unknown entity. Raised in Connecticut, he had been introduced to the field of law enforcement by his uncle, a New York state trooper, who shared stories of his shifts, including the rescue of children from a burning building. When he was 16, Chris went on a “ride along” and found himself hooked. After graduating with an associate’s degree in Criminal Justice and finishing three years in the Air Force as a Security Police Officer stationed at Pease AFB in Portsmouth, NH, Lyons worked as an officer in both Rehoboth Beach, Delaware and Georgia, but he ultimately wanted to be a small-town police chief. He also yearned to return to New England, so first he took a job with the Farmington, NH police department and subsequently, Nottingham, where he was working when he was called about the chief’s position here in Alstead.

In an effort to acquaint himself with the town during his interview process, Chris had made some stops throughout the town, including the school, to familiarize himself with the area, but he really did not know anyone beyond the Selectmen. In a recent interview, Lyons recalled that his first day on the job was the day of the Alstead Festival in 2002, a town-wide celebration held at Millot Green; he was sworn in by the Town Clerk in the morning and circulated among the citizens in the afternoon. He acknowledged that the transition for the Town of Alstead must have been difficult, yet most people were welcoming and ready for a full-time chief.

One of his first tasks was to make some hires that would bring the department up to full staffing; he hired Joliene Davis as a part-time secretary, Russell Pope as an animal control officer and Phyllis Siani as a full-time Sergeant to replace Joseph Murray, who had resigned. Milano continued in a part-time capacity for the department until 2003 when he was replaced by retired police officer, Robert Bromley. In an effort to expand community involvement, Sergeant Siani started a Kids & Cops Program at the Alstead Elementary School, which entailed her visiting the school on a monthly basis and teaching about all areas of safety, “stranger danger” and “good touch, bad touch”. The children got to know her and have a positive impression of the police. Lyons also implemented a VIPS program (Volunteers in Policing Services) with Hans and Mary Ellen Waldmann stepping up as the first volunteers. Prosecuting cases also presented challenges for small-town departments, so Chief Lyons got the Town of Alstead onboard with the Regional Prosecutor Program, which utilizes the Cheshire County prosecutor’s office and their expertise for the town’s criminal cases.

Some other personnel changes occurred during the next couple of years and by 2004, the department consisted of Chief Lyons, Lieutenant Robert Bromley as the full-time officer and Secretary Michelle Koson. Lyons had done away with part-timers because of the time and

expense to train and outfit them, only to have them stay for a short term, yet he intended to hire another full-time officer in 2005. Together, Bromley and Lyons became Emergency Medical Responders, attended joint training with the Fire and Ambulance departments and equipped the cruisers with AEDs and first responder kit bags. New digital radios, both a base unit for the station and two portable units were purchased, as well as a HAM radio for back-up communications. These trainings and equipment did not come without extra cost. Despite obtaining donations of emergency equipment from Whelen Engineering in Charlestown and financial donations from Cota & Cota, the rise in the police budget was exponential in relation to the growth of the department, increasing from just over \$100,000 spent in 2002 to nearly \$136,000 in 2004.

2005 began with the department in pretty good shape, Lt. Bromley had built workstations for the personnel and both officers were fully trained, including a disaster training for emergency management at the Police Academy in Concord. Their communications system included not only the new digital radios and HAM unit, but a generous citizen had donated two UHF units for the cruisers, enabling the officers to communicate directly with both the Alstead Fire and Highway Departments, as well as Town Offices and Vermont Police. Unfortunately, no preparation and training prepared Chief Lyons and the Alstead Police Department for what happened in October of 2005.

Early on Sunday morning October 9th, a destructive wall of water surged through the town of Alstead, following the path of Warren Brook and the Cold River, washing away roads and residences, ending the lives of four people. One of the damaged properties was the Town of Alstead's municipal building which housed the Town Clerk and Select Board's offices upstairs and the Police Department downstairs, its location from the Cold River only separated by a horse

rink and a parking lot. The water plowed through the police department's offices at nearly 6 feet high and, while the building was left standing, computers, radios and papers were rendered useless. No amount of readiness for a disaster by having the necessary equipment and training could have prepared Chief Lyons for the unexpected annihilation of his command center.

Recently, he recalled the shock of facing the reality of this situation and the frustration he had encountered while crisscrossing the town to evacuate residents from the impending flood. While the Flood of 2005 and its effect upon the town of Alstead is well documented in the book Too Much Water Too Much Rain, Chris had his own personal story to share. During the night of October 8th, in conjunction with the Fire, Rescue and Highway Departments, Lyons and Bromley knocked on the doors of residents in the area of an ever-rising brook. The police department was to be the command center, not only was its location central to other town services with a large parking lot, but thanks to the upgraded radios, his office had the best communications. While alerting the citizens, he received a mixed bag of reactions; ranging from some who quickly relocated, some who questioned him and gave him a difficult time, to the few who flat out refused to leave their homes despite his repeated door-knocking, blue lights and urgent pleadings.

Meanwhile, back at the station, Secretary Michelle Koson held down the fort, fielding phone calls and radio communications from all the departments. As the night wore on and morning approached, the rapidly rising water from the river caused Michelle to frantically gather documents and other important items in case the lower level was flooded. However, before the task was completed, the wall of water gushed through Millot Green, depositing water and muck in the Police Department, wiping out the Town's command center in minutes, with Mrs. Koson barely escaping the area in time. In retrospect, Lyons knows that as prepared as he felt that his

department was at the time, one of the decisions that he would change would be to have a “backup” command center.

In the chaotic days after the flood, when some of Alstead was cut off from the outside world, the National Guard and Sheriff’s Department set up a perimeter in an attempt to prevent looting, with residents and workers only being able to pass into certain areas. The press had been segregated, and Governor Lynch’s liaison appealed to Chief Lyons to let some of the media into the recovery areas in order to inform the rest of New Hampshire and the world what was happening in town. Escorted by the Chief of Police, news station WMUR reporter and cameraman ventured up what had been Forest Rd (State Route 123) to find a homeowner hard at work shoveling debris out of his basement in order to reconstruct his house enough to make it habitable for his family. Scott Gendron took time away from his work to give an interview that was broadcast statewide that evening and made the residents of the State of New Hampshire and beyond more aware of the extent of the disaster in the previously virtually unknown town of Alstead.

After the flood, the Alstead Police Department temporarily relocated to the Baker Building in nearby Langdon while their station was gutted and repaired. Documents and computers were lost, including the data on them, despite being sent out to the FBI for recovery, and radios and other equipment were damaged beyond repair. In March of 2006, the building was fully repaired and Chief Lyons had decided to leave to become the Chief of Police in Marlborough, NH, where during a recent interview he fondly reminisced about his time in Alstead. He feels he can never replicate the relationships that he developed while working in Alstead, especially with the Highway Department and Fire Chief. Currently in his office in Marlborough, prominently displayed behind his desk, is a framed photograph that appeared in

the Keene Sentinel days following the flood, of Chief Lyons, Fire Chief Kim Kercewich and Highway Department Head David Crosby. Lyons treasures this photo because he feels that it symbolized the close working relationship that the three of them established during the early years of his job, and relied upon during the harrowing experience of the flood in 2005.

While the flood was clearly a climactic event for the Alstead Police Department during Chris Lyons tenure, when recently asked what he thought was the most significant impact or change coming from his time here, he shared two things that improved law enforcement services for the town. The first was the addition of UHF radios to the cruisers which enhanced communications across the town's departments; Lyons is adamant in his belief that those radios saved his life during the flood, when he was constantly talking with David Crosby and Kim Kercewich down to the last minute when Crosby and Lyons vacated the Warren Brook area only moments before the water surged down toward the village. The second contribution resulted in Mutual Aid agreements being signed between Alstead and many adjacent towns. Fire Departments had had Mutual Aid agreements in place for years, but police did not, so the outcome of these contracts being signed meant that officers could assist each other in neighboring towns without being sworn members of that department, thus ensuring that in small towns where potentially only one officer could be working at a time, backup was only a radio call away. This decision, while only paperwork, represented a leap forward when it came to officer safety for the surrounding area, offering security on potentially dangerous or complicated calls. Despite Chris Lyons' short time as chief of police, those years encompassed big changes in Alstead, bringing the town its first full-time chief, initiating mutual aid to better provide coverage for the residents and weathering the biggest natural disaster in the town's history, an event that will forever bind him to Alstead.

In March of 2006, when Lieutenant Robert Bromley was sworn in as the third Police Chief for the Town of Alstead, he and Secretary Michelle Koson moved back into the recently renovated offices and continued the rebuilding process for the department and the town. Coming from years of experience in the public sector and corporate security, Bromley's transition to chief was smooth and without controversy. After a stint in the Navy during the mid-sixties, he entered law enforcement in the State of Connecticut by becoming an auxiliary State Trooper, then a full-time officer for the Town of Brookfield, rising to the rank of Captain. Bob and his wife, Janet, decided in 1986 to relocate to central Maine, where he became the Chief of Police in Fairfield, all while pecking away at his associate's degree in Criminal Justice. In the early 1990's, the Bromley's put Maine and Bob's police career behind them and moved back to Connecticut for him to take a position as Director of Corporate Security with United States Surgical Corporation. Yet another transition in 1998 brought the Bromley's to New Hampshire to help out in a family business, while Janet worked in the school system and Bob did carpentry jobs on the side.

When Chief Lyons hired him as an officer in 2003, so much time had lapsed since Bromley had been a certified police officer that he needed to attend NH Police Standards and Training for full-time officers, entailing weeks of classes, physical workouts and dormitory style living. Recently, he chuckled when he remembered the youngsters attending with him in early 2004, who would complain about their aches and pains, while at 56 years old he became one of the oldest recruits to ever attend, and successfully graduate from the Academy, outscoring many of his classmates. Bromley worked alongside Lyons for nearly two years before the October flood in 2005, having quickly been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant due to his years of experience in police work and leadership.

After the flood wiped out the Police Department's office and communications that Sunday morning, a new command post was quickly set up at the Town Hall/Fire Station on Main Street in conjunction with NH State Police and the Cheshire County Sheriff's Department. While Chief Lyons handled the media, worked with Governor Lynch's office and the Select Board, Lt. Bromley ran the control center, coordinating officers from other departments, teaming them with local volunteers who knew the area, since travelling around town had become difficult due to roads being washed away. One of the many challenges during the early days involved debris recovery and trying to identify ownership of the salvageable items in an effort to reunite belongings with their owners. This team was disbanded and the center shut down in December, as roads opened and things began to return to the new normal in Alstead.

Newly sworn into office, Chief Bromley worked alone for six months in 2006, while the Town undertook the process of hiring a new full-time officer. Marcello D'Alessandro came to Bob's attention through a friend of a relative in Connecticut and late in 2006, D'Alessandro and his wife moved to New Hampshire. With a solid officer assisting him, Bromley began the process of building a robust Police Department that would continue into the future. Chief Bromley brought a level of professionalism and accountability to the Alstead Police Department that would help ensure a healthy department that the Town of Alstead could be proud to call its own. A major contribution that most citizens were unaware of involved instituting a Policy and Procedures Manual, a handbook that addresses personnel management, interaction with the public, criminals and other agencies and general administration of law enforcement. Utilizing CALEA standards, a nationally recognized accreditation program, the chief built a guidebook that is a living document the department still employs today. He also put together a notebook of sample warrants and complaints for the departments in the county to use when filing paperwork

with the County Attorney's office, thus ensuring uniformity of language when complaints were presented to judges.

The years that Robert Bromley served as chief of police in Alstead also saw enhanced community involvement between the residents and police department. While under Lyons, the department had an outreach program with the Alstead Primary School, Bromley now allowed Officer D'Alessandro to have carte blanche to institute a Police Explorer's group. This law enforcement program gave teenagers an opportunity to learn about careers, while becoming trained with useful skills and educated about aspects of police work. The department also went to the Fall Mountain Friendly Meals to inform the elderly about issues that related to their safety and well-being. By the Spring of 2007, D'Alessandro and Bromley also had become fully trained and certified Emergency Medical Technicians, assisting the Alstead Ambulance on 43 calls that year alone, sometimes providing patient care all the way to the hospital. This gave the residents a level of service, especially during the day, that they previously did not have available.

With the stepping down of Russell Pope as Animal Control Officer in 2008, Alstead was left with just two full-time officers and the department was able to hold the budget relatively flat. However, with an economy that was struggling, Bob took the initiative to streamline some operations within the town that saved even more money, specifically, he consolidated the cell phone plans for all town departments, recommended the combination of computer servers for the Town Clerk's office, Select Board's office and Police Department and switched to a criminal software program that resulted in a savings for the department. Through austere budgeting, careful planning and well-timed purchasing, Chief Bromley was able to come in under budget for all five years of his tenure, despite an increase in departmental activity and calls for service.

Recently in recalling his years with the town, first working with Chief Lyons, then as the chief himself and finally advising the next two chiefs, Bromley shared what he thought had been his most important contribution or legacy to the Town of Alstead and its Police Department. Surprisingly, it was not his management and administration skills, nor his hard work and dedication during and after the flood, but rather Bromley perceived a sense that the people in Alstead took a certain level of comfort in the knowledge that he was a complete outsider to the area which led him to bring a fairness, impartiality and all-round good relations to the town.

Robert Bromley decided to leave the department as a full-time worker in 2010, sharing in the Town Report for that year how enjoyable his time serving the people of Alstead had been for him. He stated that the “citizens have been supportive toward the department” and his main concern for the department was that he hoped that his replacement would “continue in this direction, thereby making the transition seamless”. The chief had spent his years in leadership ensuring that his successor would be well-trained, sending Marcello to the First Line Supervision course in Rhode Island, promoting him in a timely manner, as well as allowing him to take leadership role with the Explorer Program. After stepping down, Bob has continued to work with the department, both with the newly promoted chief, Marcello D’Alessandro, in an advisory capacity for the current chief, and as a Detective for major cases.

In April 2011, Marcello D’Alessandro took over as the fourth Chief of Police, with some part-time officers filling in for shifts as needed. Bromley stayed as a part-timer, and Ray Gosetti, Cameron Prior and Dean Wright all worked full-time in neighboring towns, but assisted Alstead when needed. Originally from Connecticut, D’Alessandro graduated from Keene State College with a BS in Safety Studies, then while doing OSHA related work back home, he applied for and

was accepted to the police department in Wethersfield, CT. Marcello worked for their department for seven years, and also obtained his Master's Degree in Criminal Justice.

Recently, when asked how he first became interested in police work, he chuckled and recalled several television shows that he had loved in the 1980's that inspired him to pursue a law enforcement career. While he enjoyed his years in Wethersfield, his wife, Aimee was from New Hampshire and they longed to relocate here to raise a family. After hearing about a potential job in Alstead from a friend of his wife's, Marcello met then-Chief Bromley, went on a ride along and had an interview. Bromley showed him the Police Station and they toured the town, both still in the process of being renovated and restored from the flood the previous year and D'Alessandro fell in love with the town. During his years as an officer working under Robert Bromley, he organized the Emergency Services Explorer Post 1009 (the number utilized as a memorial to the flood date). In addition to experiencing 80's cop shows, young Marcello had also been a member of an Explorer Post as a teenager in high school and had a great connection with his advisor. The experience affected him positively and he really wanted to share that mentoring experience with the youth in Alstead, working with them as a preventative measure. The program continued for a few years until D'Alessandro was promoted and had his own children, then unfortunately the other constraints on his time made it impossible for him to continue to administrate the curriculum and activities and at that time, there was no other officer who could take over. He credits his boss, Chief Bromley, with giving him the freedom and support to follow his vision and benefit the youth of the Alstead area. Some of the teens that were involved in Explorer Post 1009 ultimately pursued careers in law enforcement, including Roger Landry, Cameron Prior and Joshua McGarvey, which spoke highly of D'Alessandro's commitment and passion for the program.

After becoming the chief in 2011, Marcello continued to strive for an “open door” policy with regard to the townspeople, he wanted to be “fair and open minded with all situations that require police intervention”. Police departments of the 21st century actively focused on sustaining community involvement and improving relationships with the citizens and Alstead was no exception. Besides the Explorer Post, D’Alessandro also was inspired to begin a local chapter of the nationwide group Crime Stoppers, calling on local police departments and the citizens of each community to work together to solve crime. The founding premise of the system was that fear and apathy prevented people from becoming involved in reporting crime or offering relevant information, but by offering anonymity and rewards, it could potentially stimulate community involvement. He realized that the area had many civic-minded individuals and in early 2012, Connecticut Valley Crime Stoppers was born, with Chief D’Alessandro facilitating the group of local law enforcement. This group is still active today, although D’Alessandro stepped down from his leadership position in 2015.

In the Annual Town Report for 2012, the chief continued to call for the citizens of Alstead to be proactive and remain engaged in protecting their community, offering quick suggestions on how to protect their home, property and neighborhood, including keeping vigilant of a car or person that “just seems not to belong”. Also in this report, D’Alessandro touched upon school safety, assuring residents that the department had an excellent working relationship with Principal Gail Rowe and that the protection of the students was paramount to both law enforcement and the school system. Addressing this issue came right on the heels of the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT and Marcello put pressure upon himself to ensure that it never happened here in Alstead. In an effort to enhance the current security at Alstead Primary School and Vilas Middle School (cameras and coded

locked doors for entrance), D'Alessandro introduced a "panic button" for the principal, lead teachers and secretaries that would eliminate the need to find and dial a telephone in the case of an active shooter situation. He also changed the policing model in town to focusing on coverage during school hours, increasing patrols on campus (drive by and walk about) and placing an officer at school during morning drop-offs and dismissals.

During 2013, the department underwent some personnel changes that D'Alessandro hoped would provide the Town of Alstead with more comprehensive police coverage. When Secretary Michelle Koson retired, he hired a replacement who he intended to be part-time secretary/ part-time officer, splitting their hours between the different duties, giving the department an extra officer. On the roster besides Chief D'Alessandro, was Roger Landry, who had been hired as a full-time officer after Bromley left the department early in 2013, Cameron Prior, still working part-time, and David Olmstead, who was hired to fill Michelle's position. In addition to secretarial responsibilities, Olmstead attended the NH Police Standards and Training part-time academy, in order to become a part-time officer for Alstead. This situation only worked for a short time however, as Olmstead left for a full-time opportunity in another town.

At the Deliberative Session in February 2014, the voters cut nearly \$400,000 from the General Operating Budget and the trickle-down effect for the Police Department manifested itself by reducing the number of officers back to two full-timers and a part-time secretary, no more money was available to hire part-time officers. After the departure of David Olmstead, the secretarial position remained unfilled until March 2015, when D'Alessandro hired Penny Gendron as the Administrative Assistant to the Police Department. The citizens of Alstead apparently did not feel the pinch where police services were concerned as the chief wrote in his

end of the year report for 2014 that he was “proud to say that over the past year I’ve received a lot of positive feedback...for the police department’s performance and activities”.

Chief D’Alessandro matured as a law enforcement officer during his years in Alstead, refining his aspiration to teach students and work with citizens. He regarded his most significant contribution to the department and the town itself the manner in which he approached police work within Alstead. Besides traditionally enforcing the law, Marcello perceived the role of the police as one of social work, focusing more on redemption rather than punishment. In the small community, police have the ability to try and work problems out locally rather than ship the cases straight off to the judicial system. His role with the Explorer Post adolescents and personal negotiations with residents was the manifestation of this belief. Years later, former teens recalled their interaction with Chief D’Alessandro, the police officer, as a positive experience by the respectful way he treated them.

Within the Alstead Police Department, 2014 held no major issues regarding their operation. Recently in an interview, Marcello shared the reasons for his departure as the full-time chief in February 2015. Late in 2014, D’Alessandro’s family situation changed and he felt that he needed a location and career change as well. The choice was difficult to make, but following his passion for school safety and teaching young students, he accepted a job in Hinsdale as their School Resource Officer, a position he currently holds. A Police Chief search committee was formed to hire his replacement, unfortunately, despite their hard work, the position was not filled, so D’Alessandro agreed to stay on part-time until the Selectmen appointed a new chief. Full-time officer Roger Landry worked by himself for a year, putting in a great deal of overtime in order to respond to the needs of the community. Finally, in February 2016, Adam Howard joined the Alstead Police Department as a full-time officer, having

previously worked in Charlestown, NH. Chief D'Alessandro remained as a part-time chief through the end of 2016, when Robert Bromley stepped into the job temporarily. The search committee rejuvenated their quest for a full-time chief in February 2017 when Sergeant Roger Landry left the department to work for a neighboring town. This time the search committee was successful in finding a candidate to fill the position; the Alstead Board of Selectmen chose Stephen Murrell as the fifth Chief of Police for the town and he was sworn in at the beginning of June 2017.

The six decades of leadership provided by the four chiefs who have served the town to date has been as varied as the men themselves, from their personal temperament and prior background to their vision and legacy, each man left his own mark on the Alstead Police Department. All of the chiefs respected their job, and while not perfect, they led the officers under them while trying to maintain and refine the department into a modern law enforcement unit that protects and serves Alstead while continuing to uphold community bonds.

Narratives of Chief Erwin Ward

By Penny Gendron

Despite being off the beaten path, the Town of Alstead has had more than its share of excitement and high-profile cases during Erwin Ward's time as Constable and Chief of Police. Besides capturing an escaped criminal, pulling over a former Manson Family member for a traffic violation, and busting up a car theft ring, Erwin Ward sniffed out the second largest pot bust in New Hampshire history. In another law enforcement role, as a NH Boat Patrol Inspector, he utilized his newfound skills in CPR to save a drowning boy from Lake Spofford. Ward seemed to have an uncanny knack for being in the right place at the right time, which could either be credited to astute police work, dumb luck, common sense or a combination of all three; no matter the circumstances that brought him to that point, he leapt into action.

When professional safecracker, Lawrence Helms, jumped out of the second story window of the Court House in Keene, law enforcement in the area were notified, including the Alstead constable. Helms had injured his leg in the fall and hid out in the woods for a couple of days, but by the third day, hunger and exhaustion drove him out of the woods. He came out of hiding on Saturday, August 12, 1961 somewhere in Alstead, then made his way to Libby's Store (located on Mechanic Street across from the current general store) to purchase food, and was recognized by a sharp-eyed clerk, who notified authorities. Meanwhile, after leaving the store, desperate to contact his cronies in Canada, Helms made a call from the pay phone located on the lawn of the Shedd-Porter Library. Based on the report from the store manager, the local New England Telephone and Telegraph office traced the call to a Fred Mellieur of Montreal. Later Saturday

afternoon, Mellieur and his companion were captured and charged with aiding and abetting Helm's escape.

By Saturday afternoon the search had intensified and narrowed, with a 30-man posse combing the area. Helm's was spotted by Kenny Stanley in the evening at 11:15 PM, who reported to Constable Ward that Helms went under the bridge in the center of town and headed southwest along the river, parallel to River Street.

According to The Keene Evening Sentinel and Ward's own recent recollections, he got Stan Kmiec to give him an old car, took out the rumble seat, and set the car up, with a man hiding in the back, way down River Street as an "empty" decoy car, hoping that Helms would see it and think it was his transport. Simultaneously, the constable's twin brother, Fire Chief Elwin Ward, armed with a shotgun, positioned himself partially down River Street near "the old Jacobson place". Elwin strolled back and forth hoping to see Lawrence Helms by the river. Constable Ward patrolled in his vehicle on the streets in case Helms doubled back, although by now, Erwin knew, based on the phone call that the Sheriff's Department had previously intercepted, that the fugitive was headed to meet up with his buddies near Bellows Falls, VT in the hope of eventually working his way to Canada.

Sometime later, a man emerged from the woods by the river fitting the well-known description of Lawrence Helms, near to where Constable Ward surmised. This man was rumped, unshaven and limping and had his hand in his pocket. Fire Chief Elwin Ward ordered him to remove his hand from his pocket, but the man refused and indicated that he had a gun of his own. Undaunted, Ward fired a warning shot into the air and again ordered the man to remove his hand from his pocket, which he did, surrendering himself immediately. Constable Erwin Ward arrived a short time later, taking the man, now known to be Helms, into custody without further incident.

While on routine patrol on May 29, 1971, Chief Ward was following a “junky, black pickup” up River Street toward the center of town when the female driver of the vehicle blew through the stop sign. He “lit her up” and when he approached the truck, he noticed a child in the back seat and a male passenger. For some reason, a standout memory of that traffic stop for Erwin was when the man stepped out of the vehicle, a glass baby bottle fell out of the truck and smashed onto the pavement. A subsequent inquiry produced the name of the driver, Linda Kasabian and that she was staying up by the lake with Mary Burroughs. When the chief called dispatch with her name, he was asked to repeat it, then asked to spell it. Although Ward recognized her name from national news as the witness for the State of California against Charles Manson in the Tate/La Bianca murders, he was confused as to why there was so much clarification over her name, not realizing that she had a warrant. After speaking with the State Police in Concord, Ms. Kasabian was brought back to Ward’s home where his wife, Miriam helped tend the baby until two marshals and a state trooper showed up to take Linda into custody. Ward does not recollect what the warrant was for.

Sometimes Ward was able to be in the right place even when he was not on duty in Alstead. The following narrative is a compilation of articles from several newspapers, personal letters and Erwin’s own recollections. On a Sunday in June 1965, while on routine patrol in the state boat on Lake Spofford, Boat Inspector Ward had pulled into the boat ramp at Brookhaven Beach to help someone with their motor problem. A woman called out to him that a boy was drowning and Erwin spotted him many yards from shore right before he went down. Ward, a life-long swimmer who had been a life guard for four years while in high school, said he had taken a “fix on the location” and he jumped into the lake fully clothed. He reached the spot where he had last seen the boy, 10-year-old Larry Crowder of Keene, NH, and dove down.

Ward reached the side of the unconscious boy just as his body hit the bottom of the lake, approximately 16 feet beneath the surface.

In a matter of minutes, he had hauled the boy to a nearby float located off shore and shouted for a resuscitator. Erwin then revived Larry using mouth-to-mouth, a skill he had only recently learned from nurses in a training class as a member of the Boat Patrol. Within a couple of minutes, life began to return to the boy and he came back to consciousness; Ward wrapped him in a blanket and brought him ashore. So prompt and effective was the resuscitation that the Spofford Fire Department's resuscitator unit was not necessary and Crowder was treated by a doctor for shock at the scene and sent home with his grandmother. Erwin recalled driving home a little shaky as the full impact of the day hit him. He was modest about his heroics, preferring to say that "with God's will the boy is alive", but word got out about that Sunday afternoon and Ward received a personal congratulatory letter from U.S. Congressman James Cleveland and in 1966, the NH Chapter of the Red Cross honored him at their annual meeting.

Recently, while recounting this event, Ward became very emotional in remembering how close to death young Larry had come and he recalled how years later, he met an adult Crowder, an engineer for the Water Department in Keene, NH, who was able to thank him for saving his life all those years before. A rescue like this speaks to the character of a man who leapt into action without a second thought for himself.

Sometimes, Chief Ward's police action hit a little closer to home, there was a time when he had to investigate and then arrest long-time citizens of Alstead. In 1968, New Hampshire State Police became aware of several vehicles that had been stolen in Ohio and Pennsylvania turned up in Vermont and New Hampshire. This inter-state auto theft ring had a stop in Alstead, where the owner received the vehicles at his garage and then redistributed them, either by selling

them (one to his own mother) or moving them elsewhere. He was assisted by four other Alstead residents in his endeavor. When State Police approached Chief Ward about the auto thefts, they enlisted his help in undertaking surveillance on the owner. In a recent interview, Erwin recounted one time when he was watching the business, in order to avoid alerting his quarry, he used venison that he had brought along to keep the barking dog quiet. Eventually, enough evidence was gathered and in September 1968, charges were filed against the business owner for receiving stolen goods and concealing stolen property, additionally concealing stolen property charges were filed against two of the other four residents. When asked what it was like arresting his neighbors, Ward replied, “the law’s the law” but he was quick to add that he paid his dues and went on to become an upstanding citizen of Alstead, donating time and money for improvements around town, such as the original dugouts at Millot Green and a second police cruiser.

The case that brought the most recognition for Chief Ward was the notorious “Pot Farm” bust in 1984 when \$3.7 million crop of prime marijuana was seized, resulting in four subsequent arrests. There was prolific newspaper coverage throughout the state and it resulted in Ward being interviewed for New Hampshire Profiles magazine the next year and honored by Governor John Sununu for his savvy police work. Talking about this case continues to bring a sparkle to his eyes and a smile to his face and recently, Erwin recounted his adventure.

It began one night with a citizen on Alstead Center Road calling in a report of a suspicious vehicle going up and down their neighbor’s driveway, a house that was set back from the road on a knoll, surrounded by fields and a large wooded area. Recently, the property had changed hands and the new owner(s) were unfamiliar to townspeople. By the time the Chief went to the residence and checked around, the reported vehicle was no longer there, but in walking around the house and grounds, Ward claimed that “something just didn’t feel right”. He

returned the next day, hoping to make contact with the homeowner in the daylight, but no one was there. His senses still told him that there was something out of the ordinary at the property, so he decided to walk around the land a bit. In the woods a short distance from the house, he discovered a crop of well-established marijuana plants and continued to prowl around further. He found some other plantings and decided that his investigation needed to end immediately.

Upon contacting State Police with his discovery, law enforcement came up with a plan that included surveillance of the property, as well as quietly researching the current property owner and residents of the house. Given the rural location of the house and a small town full of nosy residents, parking a car across the street, slurping coffee while doing observation with high powered binoculars was not a viable option. Assisted by Fish and Game Warden Claude Dumont, both men dressed in camouflage, parked separately down the road and “hunted” in the surrounding woods. One of these times, Ward was almost “outed” by a resident who saw him walking on the side of the road between his truck and where he was entering the woods; she pulled over to offer him a ride, thinking he had broken down. He declined the ride, but before she left him, she proceeded to quiz him about what he was doing!

As a result of their investigations, the discoveries were made that no one was actually residing at the house on a regular basis, but several people were observed coming and going at intervals and tending their “crops”. Mature marijuana was being grown at multiple locations on the property, as well as seedlings in the garage and any illegal activity that may have been occurring in the house was unknown at this point. After obtaining the appropriate warrants, Chief Ward, Fish and Game, and New Hampshire State Police converged on the house early one Saturday morning in July, 1984. As they crept quietly through the woods and fields, coming from different directions, attempting to net their quarry, the men had a code phrase that they

could radio when a suspect or suspects were identified, “Green Grasshoppers”. While stealthily closing in on the house, one of the officers must have been spotted, because suddenly four people poured out of the house and began running in different directions in an attempt to escape. Over the radios, calls of “Green Grasshopper, Green Grasshopper, Green Grasshoppers everywhere” began to be heard and the scrambling began. Fortunately, due to strategic placement of law enforcement, all four suspects were apprehended that day. A subsequent search of the house revealed that indoor growing apparatus was in the process of being set up, in addition to the garage location, also numerous patches of marijuana, five acres in total, were discovered. All four suspects, two men, one woman and a 17-year-old male, were all from Massachusetts, and consequently charged with various counts, including felony charges of manufacturing marijuana. None of them owned the property. Throughout the course of the next few months, the charges were dropped against the woman, while the men, including the juvenile, were prosecuted and sentenced. Every attempt was made to locate the owner of the property, listed on the records as “Byron Gavett” but all the transactions had been done through telephone and fax and the conclusion was that it was a fictitious name. To this day, the true owner of the Alstead Center Road property in 1984 remains a mystery.

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