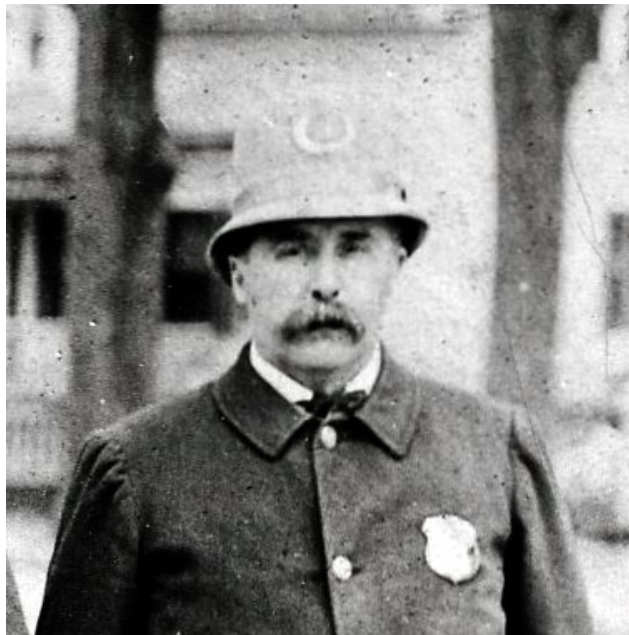


Patrolling A Beat Throughout The Years

By Det. Sgt. Jim Ignasher - CPD, Retired
Updated March, 2017

Legend has it that the word “cop” is an acronym for “constable on patrol”. While some outside the profession may think “cop” is a derogatory word, in police circles it can be a complement. For an officer to be told by superiors and colleagues that he or she is a “good cop” is considered high praise, for a good cop always gets the job done.

One may be surprised to learn that although Cranston had police constables since its incorporation in 1754, there were no regular patrol beats as we think of them today until the 1890s. The first permanent beat was a “foot post” established in Edgewood in 1895. Records show that Constable Benjamin R. Allen was assigned to cover this new post, thus becoming Cranston’s first “beat cop”, walking his post during the overnight hours. Within two years the Arlington and Auburn areas also had regular night patrolmen. This was the beginning of the patrol-beat system in Cranston.



Benjamin R. Allen
Cranston’s first “beat cop”.

In the beginning, Cranston officers patrolled their beats by foot, horseback, and even bicycles. In the late 1800s, bicycles became popular and bike clubs sprang up everywhere, much to the disdain of some pedestrians who felt the new contraptions were a menace. According to a book by Cranston historian Gladys Brayton titled, "Other Days and Other Ways", in 1895, the Chief of Police received so many complaints of speeding cyclists on Narragansett Boulevard that he detailed an officer to issue citations to any violators. One can only imagine the scene as a uniformed policeman, huffing and puffing while pedaling madly after a "speeder", then ordering him to pull over, thus affecting Cranston's first "traffic stop".

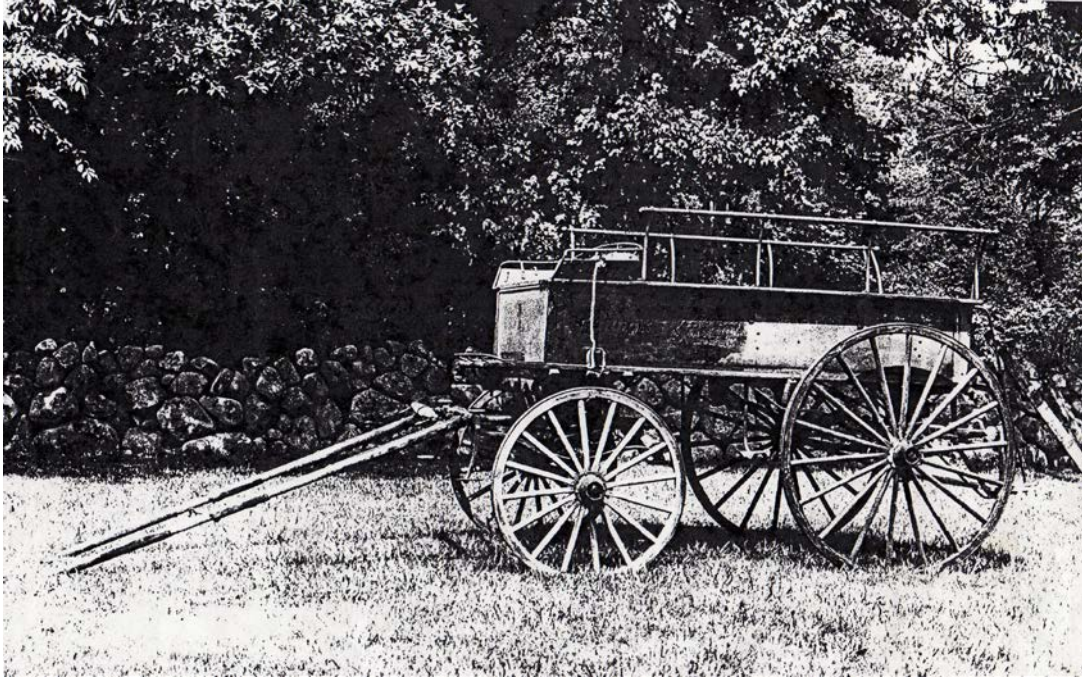


Patrolman John McGee in Auburn - Circa 1915.
(Photo courtesy of the Cranston Historical Society.)



Patrolmen John McGee, (on left), and Clay DeBow, (on right) patrolled the city on horseback.

By the early 1900s, trolley lines ran from Knightsville to Edgewood along Park Avenue, and from downtown Providence to Oaklawn via Cranston Street and Oaklawn Avenue. It is said that officers sometimes made use of the trolleys to transport arrestees from outlying foot beats to police headquarters in Knightsville.



**This wooden buck-board wagon was used
by the Cranston Police from the late 1800s to 1911.
(Photo courtesy of Jack Simmons, Meshanticut Park Volunteer Fire Co.)**

Perhaps the first “patrol vehicle” used by the department was the wooden horse-drawn wagon pictured above. It was made by the Abbot Downing Company of Concord, New Hampshire, manufacturers of the famous Concord Stagecoach. Its serial number was 24646.

The wagon was painted black, with gold leaf lettering on each side that read “POLICE DEPT”, on top, with “CRANSTON” beneath. It was retired from police service in 1911 when the department obtained its first patrol car. (More about that later.)

At a city council meeting held on November 20, 1911, a resolution was passed that ordered the Chief of Police to turn the wagon over to the Arlington Volunteer Fire Company to be used as a fire wagon. Fifty dollars was allotted to the fire company to buy hoses and make any necessary modifications.

It is believed that the wagon was given to the Arlington Fire Company in memory of Chief of Police John Bigbee, who had also served as Fire Chief for the Arlington volunteers. In 1908, Bigbee died as a result of an injury he received while fighting a fire at a farm located near present day Cranston Street and Gansett Avenue.

The wagon was painted red for its new firefighting role, with traditional gold leaf striping added for ornamentation on each side. The gold leaf on the left side was outlined in black, presumably in memory of Chief Bigbee.

It is unknown when the wagon last saw active service, but sometime afterwards it came into possession of the Cranston Historical Society and was put in storage.

In 1989, the historical society contacted the Meshanticut Park Volunteer Fire Company and asked if they would be interested in buying the old fire wagon. Jack Simmons, a longtime member of the fire company, arranged for the purchase of the wagon and brought it to the Meshanticut station at 495 Phoenix Avenue.

The wagon was in poor condition after years of neglect so Mr. Simmons, with the help of another volunteer, Robert Gillespie, set out to restore it. Upon stripping off the red paint, the black paint from its days of police service was revealed.



The wagon under restoration in 1989



The original paint being stripped away.



As the red paint was stripped away,
the original gold leaf and paint appeared.

Unfortunately, the restoration was never completed. The wagon was stripped down to bare wood and a coat of linseed oil was applied. It was then offered for sale to the Cranston Police department in the early 1990s, but the department declined the offer. The Meshanticut Park Fire Company was disbanded in 1994, and the wagon is presently located at the Oaklawn Volunteer Firemen's Museum in western Cranston.

THE MOTORIZED ERA

Today, with cell phones as common as automobiles, calling for a police officer in times of emergency is merely a few pushes of a button away, but in the early 20th Century finding an officer when one was needed was not as easy. At a time when policemen walked their posts without the aid of radios, and many homes lacked telephones, it was often up to the citizen to go out and find an officer themselves. If the situation was an emergency, the fact that the officer had to run or pedal a bicycle to the scene often left him physically tired from the trip.

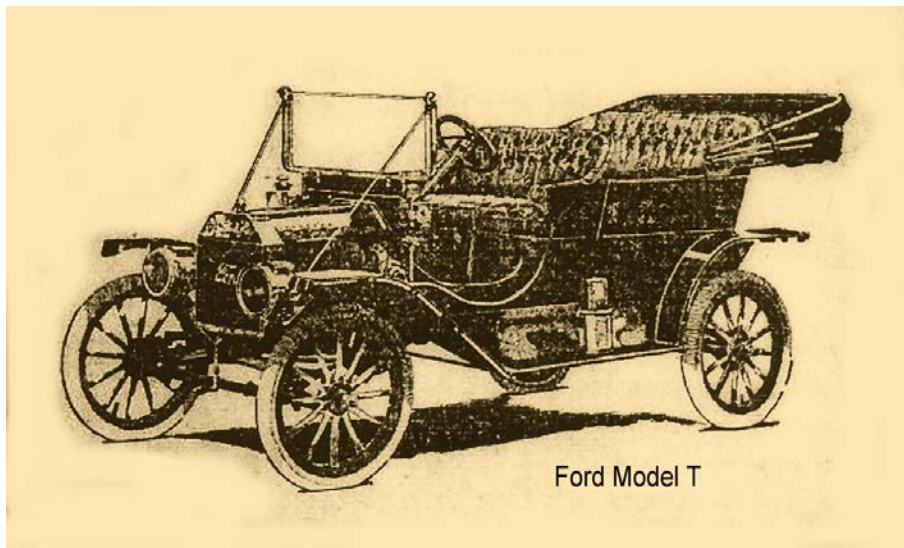
As early as 1905, major cities such as New York and Chicago had begun experimenting with motorized patrol cars, but these were the exception and not the rule.

In 1910, the automobile or "horseless carriage", had only been around for a short period of time and was still a luxury item for the wealthy. The idea that an automobile should be used for police work was seen as progressive by some, but extravagant by others. Therefore, when the idea was proposed in Cranston it was met with mixed emotions.

The newly formed permanent police department of 1910 consisted of a chief and ten patrolmen- eight of whom worked nights. One of the officers who worked the day shift was William H. Stone, who came from a well-to-do family that owned several automobiles. In July of 1910, Stone's family offered to donate one of their cars to the police department.

A plan was organized by the mayor to station a patrolman at city hall, (Then located in Knightsville where the gazebo now stands), from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., with the “patrol car” parked outside. This way, if a citizen needed a police officer they knew where to find one. The plan worked well and quickly won public approval.

The first Cranston police car was a black Ford, Model-T roadster, with a 35 horsepower engine that could achieve a top speed of 60 mph. A *Providence Journal* article that appeared July 7, 1910, stated that, (Cranston) “*will probably go down in history as the first city in the world in which a patrolman covers his beat in a high powered, distance-destroying, upholstered, buzz-buggy.*” Cranston may not have been the first in the world, or even the country, to use motorized patrol cars, but it’s safe to say that it was the first municipality in Rhode Island, and possibly all of New England.

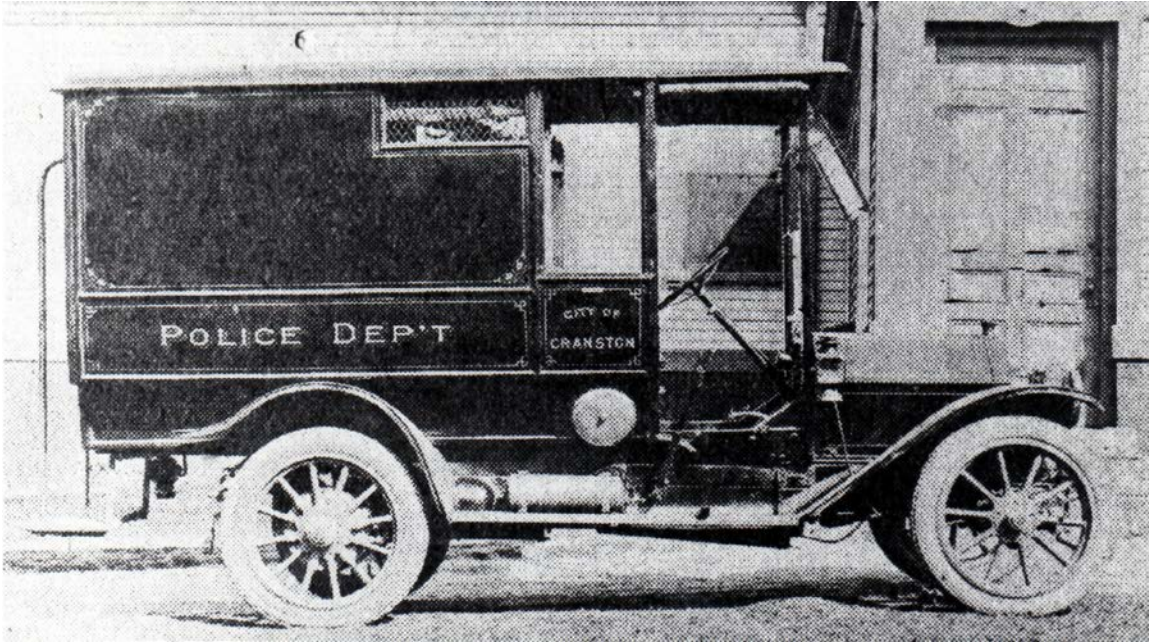


Ford Model T

Cranston's first police car was primitive by today's standards. It lacked emergency lights and siren. It didn't have a radio or protective cage for transporting prisoners. Its black canvas roof and lack of windows made it hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and wet when it rained. But for its day, it was the most technologically advanced piece of equipment that the department owned.

Early automobiles were notoriously unreliable. Engine failures and flat tires were not only common, but expected. In summer they were prone to overheating. In winter, before the days of antifreeze, the water from the radiator had to be drained to prevent freezing and cracking the engine block. Cold weather prevented many cars from starting even into the 1940s.

Despite the problems with early autos, they were still faster and easier to keep than horses as evidenced by city records from 1914, which indicate the city bought another car for the department. The make and model are not mentioned.



First Patrol-Ambulance wagon used by the department -1915.

In 1915, a combination Patrol-Ambulance was custom built for the department at a cost of \$950.00. The city purchased a used Cadillac car and custom fitted the chassis with a body designed by Mayor Horton and Chief of Police James E. Cuff. The work was done at the shop of Lewis L. Fales in Edgewood. If the department had purchased the vehicle outright from the factory the cost would have been three times as much.

Although still primitive by design, this vehicle was a step above the department's other two automobiles because it carried rescue and first-aid equipment. Even though it didn't have emergency lights, it was equipped with a bell to warn people of its approach.

The vehicle was used on many occasions to transport sick and injured persons to the hospital, and its motorized speed over horse-drawn wagons undoubtedly saved many lives.

This type of vehicle was quite an innovation for a new city the size of Cranston. The population at the time was only between fifteen and twenty thousand, and such luxuries were usually only found in much larger cities.



**Patrolman Maher -1920s.
(Ptl. Maher was later promoted to Sergeant.)**

In 1916 the department purchased its first motorcycle at a cost of \$200.00. The motorcycle offered economy and visibility to the public, but early motorcycles were not much more than elaborate bicycles with engines.

The department's early motorcycles were black with simple lettering on the gas tank that read "Cranston Police". They didn't have emergency lights or sirens until the late 1920s, and the officers who rode them didn't begin to wear safety helmets until the 1950s.

In 1917 the department bought a brand new Ford touring car for \$378.50. Cars of this era were not equipped with heaters, seatbelts, safety glass, window defrosters, or many other options taken for granted today.

On April 15, 1925, the department received a new patrol wagon – ambulance to replace the ten year old 1915 model. It was painted black with gold lettering on the sides. This new wagon was equipped with both a bell and a hand-crank siren, and also featured electric driving lights which were a big innovation over the kerosene type used on the earlier wagon.



**The 1925 Patrol-Ambulance wagon parked at Randall Pond about 1933.
(Left to right, ??, Sgt. McGee, Francis Murphy)**

In 1927, another officer was added to the “motorcycle squad”, and in 1929 the squad was increased to six men. These officers were primarily “traffic cops” charged with enforcing motor vehicle laws of the day. They wore a special wheel, arrow, and wing insignia on the left sleeves of their uniforms.



Motorcycle officers – 1929

Note the cross draw holsters and winged-wheel insignia.

In 1930, signal boxes, also known as “call boxes”, were installed on telephone poles throughout the city. The boxes were put on separate circuits, and strung together on like a string of Christmas tree lights. Each beat had its own circuit, and each box had a small blue light on top. When the desk sergeant at headquarters wanted to contact a beat officer, he would set the lights on that officer's beat to flashing. The beat officer was expected to periodically check the boxes on his beat, and if he saw one flashing, he would open the box and use the telephone inside to find out where he was needed.

Later boxes were equipped with a special key slot where officers were required to “ring in” at headquarters to let the desk sergeant know that everything was alright, and that he was in fact doing his job. If an officer failed to “ring in” after a certain period of time, another officer was sent to look for him. If the officer who failed to “ring in” didn't have a good excuse he was apt to be disciplined. Discipline was often meted out in the form of “free time”, which required an officer to work extra shifts without pay. Besides failing to “ring in”, an officer could also be disciplined for failing to discover a burglary or other crime on his beat before the property owner did.



Motorcycle Officer Henry R. Johnson – 1929
Officer Johnson was shot and killed in the line of duty in August of 1930.

(For more information see “In Memoriam”)



A Police “call box” still in use in 1991

Walking a foot beat was seldom easy. It was never considered too hot, too cold, too snowy, or too wet to walk the beat. Regular foot beats continued in Cranston into the 1960s.

Retired officers tell interesting stories of their days on foot patrol. The Arlington Beat was considered the “punishment beat” due to the hills. An officer would have to walk up one hill to ring a box, then down to the bottom to ring the next.

Some tell of store owners giving officers keys to their business while letting the officer know there was a coffee pot in the back room. This may seem strange today, but what better security in the days before alarms than to have an on-duty police officer refreshing himself inside?

And sometimes, in really bad weather, a box would “malfunction”. And like a string of Christmas lights, when one went out, they all went out.



Steel boat on Randall Pond - 1933

In July of 1931, a steel boat which could be towed by a trailer behind the patrol wagon was bought by the department for use on the various ponds and lakes in the city in the event of an emergency. Being made of steel, it was said to be “unsinkable”.





**1930 Ford Model-A one and a half ton wagon
Photo taken in front of old city garage in Knightsville.**

In 1933 the department replaced the 1925 patrol-ambulance wagon with a used but reconditioned Ford Model A. This new wagon featured a closed cab which protected the officers from the elements where the two earlier ones did not. It also had an electric siren and a red emergency light mounted to the roof. Like its predecessors, it too was painted black with gold and green shaded lettering. Besides being larger than the 1925 wagon, it had a more powerful engine. It was stored in the city garage located behind the old police station in Knightsville.

Police cars for most departments of this era were generally painted black. The two-tone, black and white color scheme didn't become popular until later. Lettering on large vehicles such as the one above was typically large and ornate, but on regular patrol cars it tended to be very plain and simple.



**1930 Ford wagon.
(Note the single red light on roof.)**



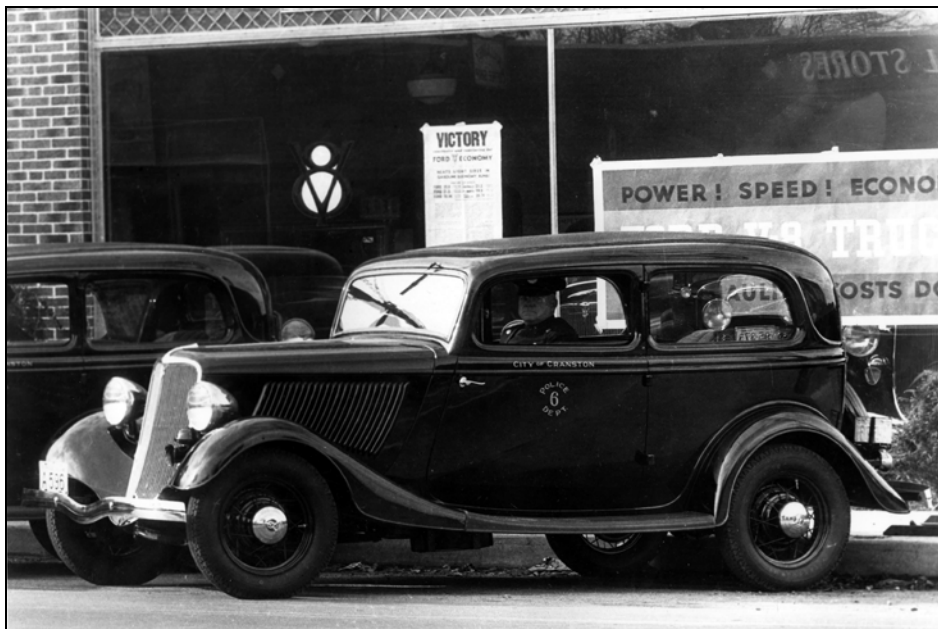
Typical police car graphics of the 1930s.



Six brand new 1933 Fords in front of Sandagger Ford at 721 Reservoir Avenue.

In November of 1933 the department purchased six new patrol cars in addition to the reconditioned 1930 Ford wagon at a cost of \$565.00 each.

The new Ford Victoria's, or "Vicky's" as they were called, were equipped with 221 cubic inch V-8 engines that could deliver 65 to 75 horsepower.



Close-up of a 1933 Ford patrol car.

A major technological innovation for 1933 was the installation of the first police radios in the patrol cars. These were simple one-way, AM band, radios that were not always reliable. They were limited due to the fact that they could only receive transmissions from headquarters, but could not broadcast back, much like a regular car radio of today can receive a radio station, but the driver can't talk back. When a patrol car received a radio message from headquarters, the officer acknowledged by driving to a call box, and calling the desk sergeant.

Another limitation was that each car had its own frequency which didn't allow cars to broadcast to each other, nor hear when a broadcast was given to a neighboring beat. If the desk sergeant wanted to give out a general broadcast, he had to do it numerous times – once for each car.

The new radios were also subject to weather interference and so called "dead areas" where the signal couldn't be picked up. However, despite their limitations, the radios greatly improved communications between headquarters and the officers, and cut response time.

It wasn't until 1948 that the first two-way FM band radios were installed in Cranston's patrol cars.



Cranston Police Radio Equipment - 1933



Six new 1935 Fords.



A 1935 Ford.
In 1935 the department added six more cars its fleet.

World War II And After

The United States entered World War II on December 7, 1941 with the attack on Pearl Harbor. Afterwards, the nation's police forces began to take on what today would be referred to as homeland security. Local police departments now worried about sabotage to water systems and government facilities. There was even a period of time when many thought an enemy invasion might be attempted on American soil. In preparation of this, many civilians became air raid wardens and plane spotters, and civil defense measures were put into place.

As part of civil defense, the Cranston police department acquired a new ambulance to replace the aging 1930 Ford wagon at a cost of \$1600, paid for through public donations. The new vehicle was a 1942 Buick equipped with the latest emergency equipment. Its V-8 engine could deliver 110 horsepower which was considered very good for the day.

Unfortunately, the ambulance soon became a "white elephant" for the department because, due to gasoline rationing, doctors began to use it as a taxi service for their patients to bring them to and from appointments. Since the vehicle had been paid for with public donations, it was difficult for the department to refuse, and since no fees were charged by the police, it became a cost burden for the department to operate the vehicle.

One tragic incident that occurred during World War II required the police to respond with the ambulance for two of their own. The incident was related to the author by Paul Soscia, a retired lieutenant, who was a young patrolman at the time.

Patrolman Soscia was in the basement of a house on Cranston Street near Howard Avenue with a captain and another officer. The captain was moving some personal items when he noticed a leaky spigot on a 55 gallon drum of kerosene. As he unsuccessfully tried to fix it, the other officer suggested to the captain that he send the rookie, (Soscia), to go and buy a new one. The captain gave Patrolman Soscia a two dollar bill and sent him away. As Soscia was leaving the house an explosion occurred. As smoke billowed from the basement, the captain emerged with his uniform completely engulfed in flames.

Officer Soscia rode in the back of the ambulance with the captain as they raced towards the hospital. The officer at the wheel was reportedly driving so fast that the captain said to Soscia, "Tell him to slow down! Two of us are already dead, there's no sense in killing any more!" He died a short time later. Officer Soscia carried that two dollar bill with him for many years to remind him of his narrow escape.



**1942 Buick Ambulance
Specialists George E. Farrow & Earl P. Tucker**

Since the automobile industry had shut down production in 1942 to re-tool for the war effort, no cars were produced for the public until 1946. Therefore, the motoring public had to make do with what they had for the duration, and this included the police department. When auto production resumed, cars were still in short supply as the eager public bought them up as fast as Detroit could make them. The new cars still had pre-war styling and technology with a few exceptions.

After the war, the road systems in urban areas of this country had greatly improved allowing cars to travel at greater speeds in comfort and safety. Police cars up to this point were simply regular automobiles with lettering and a siren added, but by the early 1950s, the auto industry began to offer special "police packages" specifically designed for police work with bigger and faster engines.

In 1953, Ford advertised a 125 horsepower "Interceptor" V-8 engine was available with its new Ford police cars.

In 1957 Plymouth advertised a 290 horsepower engine in its police brochures which stated the car had been *"engineered from the ground up to handle this tremendous power."*

Each car company tried to out-do the other in sales. In 1958 Ford declared that *"more Ford police cars are sold than all other makes combined."*



Police license plates from the 1950s.



Cranston Motorcycle officers – 1950s

The 1960s, A New Era

The 1960s became the age of “muscle cars”, cars that were built for speed and handling, and police cars were no exception.

In 1960 Plymouth offered a “Golden Commando” V-8 361 cu. In. engine that could deliver 305 horsepower!

Plymouth advertised its 1966 police package with the words, *“If you want to catch up fast...the 66 Plymouth Fury Pursuit is the vehicle that will do it for you.”* It came standard with a 318 cu. In. engine, but added, *“if you really want to fly, order the 66 Plymouth Pursuit Special with its eager 383 cu. In. V-8 engine...”*

Dodge offered a 440 cu. In. V-8, *“For extra get-up-and-go.”*

The Ford Interceptor package came with a 428 cu. In. engine which it advertised as *“a real scorcher that turns out 360 hp. With top speeds well in excess of 100 miles per hour.”*

However, Ford also offered an inline six cylinder engine for the economy minded departments.



A 1961 Ford used by Patrolman Bill Loux of the K-9 Division. The car was black with no markings. (Note the combination red light/siren on the roof.) This vehicle had a six cylinder engine with 3-speed shift on the column.



1962 Ford Galaxie – Reservoir Avenue. Photo taken 1963.



**An unknown officer directing traffic – September 4, 1963.
The police car is a 1963 Ford Galaxie.**

In 1963, the K-9 Division received a new Ford station wagon equipped to suit their needs. It was painted blue with a badge emblem on each front door identifying it as a K-9 unit. Up until this point, all of Cranston's police cars had been black. Chief Fouchecourt liked the new color so much that in 1964 all new patrol cars were ordered in blue. The cars remained blue until 1977.



**1963 Ford station wagon used by the K-9 Division.
Bill Loux on left, Warren Edman on right.
(Photo courtesy of Bill Loux.)**



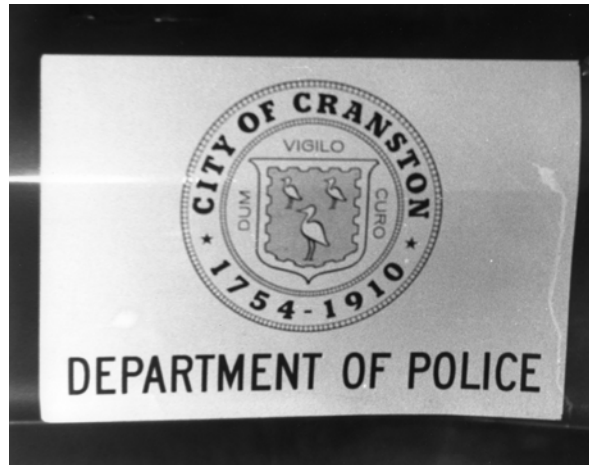
A 1964 Cranston police license plate.



A 1966 Ford



A 1966 Cranston police license plate.



Cranston police cars used this blue and gold colored door emblem from about 1964 to 1977.



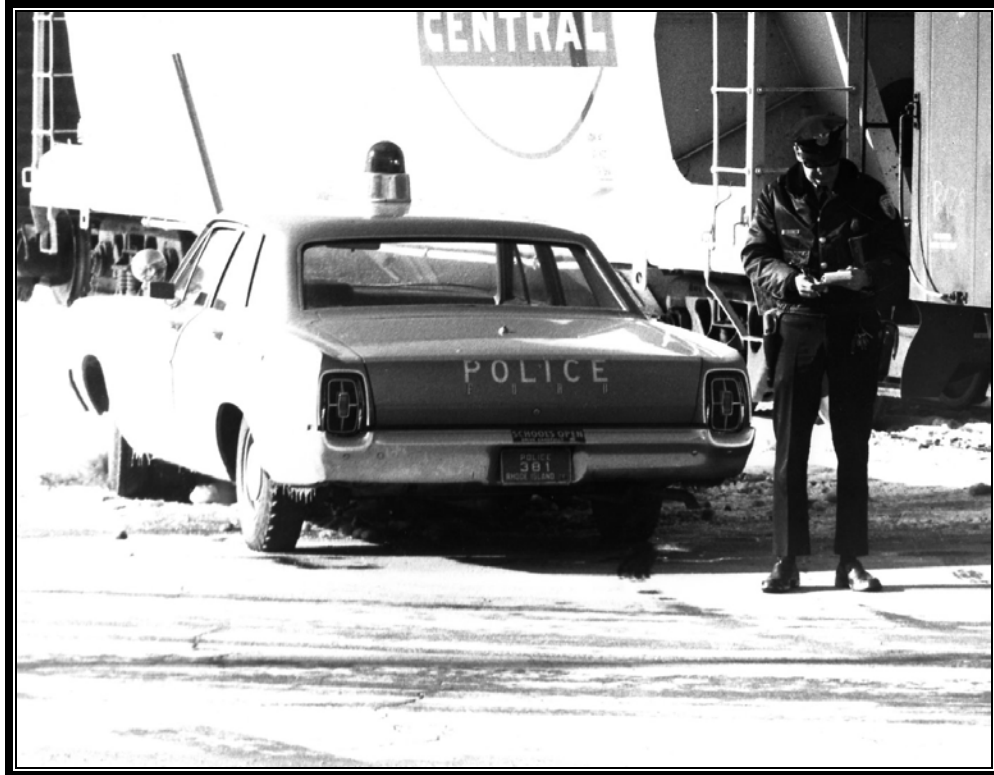
**A 1968 Plymouth Fury on Reservoir Avenue.
(Note that there is no protective cage between front and back seat.)**



Sgt. Ronald DesJarlais – Reservoir Ave. - 1968



A 1968 Cranston police license plate



Officer Ray Flynn standing next to a 1968 Ford at the Dyer Ave. rail crossing.



A 1969 Plymouth in front of the Hall Manor in Edgewood.

Into the 1970s

The 1970s brought a few improvements to police cars. Police packages came with stronger suspensions to enhance control at high speeds, and which could stand up to the rigors of police service. The cars had better electrical systems to accommodate the multi-emergency light systems that were beginning to appear. Police cars also came equipped with items like power steering and power brakes that were formally special options found on pricier vehicles.

Officer safety was also increased with the installation of protective cages to separate the arrestees in the back seat from the officer in the front. This not only protected the officer from potential attacks, but also diminished escape attempts.

The 1970s was also a time when federal money was abundant and available to police departments. A federal program known as the Fatal Accident Reduction Enforcement Program, (F.A.R.E.), gave money to many departments nationwide to purchase traffic station wagons to be used to enforce motor vehicle laws. The wagons carried radar and other equipment used to investigate traffic accidents.



One of two 1972 Chevy traffic wagons purchased by the department with money from the F.A.R.E. Program. Each wagon was painted white with red lettering and gold door emblems.

(Note the double light bars on the roof.)



Police Cars in the rear lot of the Atwood Ave. headquarters.



**A 1972 Plymouth on Cranston St. near Webster Ave.
facing the old trolley barn – now demolished**



A 1974 Plymouth Satellite showing a “55 SAVES” emblem. These emblems were placed on cars when the national speed limit was lowered from 65 mph to 55 mph, to remind motorists that 55 mph not only saved gas but lives. Photo taken in 1975.



A 1975 Plymouth Fury



A 1975 Ford Grand Torino in front of the Atwood Ave. police station.

Another improvement to officer safety was the addition of extra lighting on the patrol cars. Many departments opted to replace the traditional single “cherry” or “gumball” style roof light with dual light bars which offered better visibility at accident scenes and traffic stops.

Cranston first began using dual light bars in 1972 on patrol cars that covered beats with highways on them. By the mid 1970s all patrol cars were equipped with them.

In the photo above, one can see that the car has both the original “cherry” light, and the dual light bar mounted behind it. The cherry light was red and the other lights were blue. It was during this period that the department began to move to a red/blue light scheme.

The 1975 Ford police cars came with a standard 351 cu. in. engine and automatic 3-speed transmission. It was about this time that automatic transmissions were starting to become standard equipment on most cars instead of an option. This was a big improvement for officers who no longer had to manual shift the transmission while responding to calls.

The '75 Fords also had solid state ignition systems, front and rear self-adjusting independent brakes, heavy duty frame and springs, extra control shock absorbers, and a speedometer that read up to 140 miles per hour.

Besides the 351 cu. in. engine, Ford also offered a 400 and a 460 cu. in. “police interceptor” package.



A 1975 Ford with improved emergency lighting.



Cranston Street at Chestnut Hill Avenue - 1975



A 1974 Ford Econoline van.

During the 1970s the department used vans as both patrol vehicles and as prisoner transport vehicles. By the end of the decade vans were no longer used to cover patrol beats. The one pictured above later became the first vehicle assigned to the S.W.A.T. team.



A 1975 Cushman one-man patrol scooter.

In 1975 the department bought two patrol scooters to be used for special details such as the annual St. Mary's feast held in Knightsville. The scooters were blue with a single red light on top. Both were sold at auction in the late 1980s.

In 1977 the department changed the color of its patrol cars from blue to yellow. The story goes that Chief Moretti went to a chief's conference in Maryland and saw that the Maryland State Police drove yellow cars. He was told that the light color offered more visibility and reduced accidents. When the chief returned to Rhode Island he began to change the color of Cranston's police cars.

The new color was "Jasmine Yellow", with a four inch light blue stripe that ran the length of the cars on either side. Wording was done in red reflective letters. The word "CRANSTON" was placed on each front door in red reflective lettering.

The yellow cruisers were not well received by the rank and file officers who felt the cars lacked style and looked like taxi cabs. Cranston officers would get good natured teasing from other departments for the "generic taxi cabs" they drove.



A 1978 Chrysler Newport. Rear lot of Atwood Ave. headquarters.

In addition to the color change, the new cars were being equipped with a newer type of light bar which featured strobe lights instead of the traditional revolving lights. The strobe lights were brighter than conventional lights and offered better protection and visibility especially in rain or fog. By 1980 every car in the fleet was equipped with red and blue strobe lights.



A 1978 Plymouth, Note the long “whip” antenna on the roof.



A 1978 Plymouth Volare wagon – Rear lot of Atwood headquarters.

The 1980s

By 1980, all police cars were coming equipped with an option that would have been unheard of only a few years earlier – air conditioning.

The cruisers were also equipped with better radio systems. Gone were the long “whip” style antennas of earlier times, replaced by short stubby ones only several inches long. By now the department was operating on three radio frequencies supported by a repeater system to boost the signals for better reception.



A Cranston police license plate used from 1981 to 1983.



A 1985 Plymouth Fury



1985 Plymouth Fury's.

In February of 1986, the department again changed the color scheme of its police cars from yellow to a red, white, and blue color scheme, said to have been designed by Major Edward Manocchia. One by one the yellow patrol cars were sent out for repainting.



**A 1985 Plymouth after re-painting
Note the aerodynamic strobe light bar with “built-in” siren.**



Officer Mike Falls in a 1988 Ford Crown Victoria.

By the late 1980s, Cranston cruisers had one of the best light bars on the market. Besides being aerodynamic, they featured front “take down” lights, side “alley” lights, and rear view “wig-wag” lights in addition to the high powered red and blue strobe lights.



Although marked as a police vehicle, this pickup truck was used by city mechanics who worked on the police cars at the old city garage in Knightsville. Photo taken - circa 1984



1988 Ford Crown Victoria

The 1990s

By 1990, police cars were coming equipped with comfort and safety features never before offered in police packages.

The cars performed better with their new fuel injected V-8 engines. Individual and adjustable cloth covered seats replaced the traditional single position vinyl bench seat. Tilt steering wheels, electric windows, and AM/FM radios also added to a comfortable environment.

Safety wise, the cars were equipped with air bags. Solid Plexiglas shields between the front and rear seat replaced the traditional “cage”, which prevented arrestees from spitting at officers.

Aesthetically, Cranston’s cars changed little. In 1988, when Rhode Island instituted the 911 system, the 911 emblem was added to the rear doors of the cruisers. In 1991 the red shield door emblem of the 1980s was replaced by a more subdued emblem. Other than that, the cars retained their paint scheme and graphics for the rest of the decade.



**Cruiser door emblem.
First used in 1991.**



1990 Ford Crown Victoria



1991 Ford Crown Victoria



1991 Ford Crown Victoria



1991 Ford Crown Victoria



L to R, Officers Mike Douglas and Robert Brothers on Ferncrest Avenue at Ingleside Ave. after Hurricane Bob – August, 1991.



A “radio tree” set-up, first introduced in the 1991 Fords. The radio, public address, lights and siren controls were all within easy reach.



A 1992 Chevrolet.
Note the “push bars” on the front.

The 1992 Chevrolet's purchased by the department came with a “futuristic” digital dashboard. By now the automakers were re-designing their cars with a more streamlined look.



Front View – 1992 Chevrolet Patrol Car



Officer Anthony Meola using the automated gas system- May 1992.

In the 1990s, officers gassed their cruisers at the beginning of each shift using an automated gas system located at the old city garage in Knightsville. Each officer was issued a plastic computer card which they inserted into the system like an ATM card. The card activated the system and recorded the time, the cruiser number, and how many gallons of gas the officer pumped.



A 1993 Ford Crown Victoria
The only real change with the 1993 patrol cars was the light bar.



Car 1859



In 1997, a new Ford was assigned to the Traffic Division. This was the first time a cruiser had been specifically marked as such.



1997 Ford Crown Victoria in front of old police station at 275 Atwood Ave.



1997 Ford



1997 Ford



In the 1990s bicycle patrols were re-instituted by the department, after having not been used since the early part of the 20th century. This photo shows Officer Tom Mooney on one of the department's new bicycles.

The New Millennium



A 2001 Ford behind old police station at 275 Atwood Ave.



In 2003, the cruiser graphics were changed to give the patrol cars a more updated look. Pictured above is a 2007 Ford.



Car 619 in front of police headquarters – June, 2014



2014 Chrysler patrol car



Car 173 - June, 2014



Car 162 – June, 2014



Car 619 – June, 2014



Unmarked patrol cars – June, 2014

By the early 2000s the department began utilizing unmarked cars for patrol duties. The cars were equipped with hidden emergency lighting and sirens.



School Resource Officer Vehicle – June, 2014



Former School Resource Officer Vehicle – June, 2014



Ford Police Car #168



Traffic Unit Vehicle – June, 2014



In 2016 the colors and graphics of Cranston's police cars were changed to this black, blue, and silver scheme. Photo taken March 5, 2016.



Photo taken March 5, 2016



Photo taken March 5, 2016



Some of the new patrol vehicles came equipped with “ghost graphics”; lettering that only shows up when illuminated by lights.



Interior of a modern-day Cranston police patrol car. Photo taken March, 2016.

Cranston officers of today patrol their beat in relative luxury compared to those who came before them. Today's cruisers are equipped with on-board computers that can run checks as fast as an officer can input the data. As a comparison, as late as the year 2001, if an officer wanted a license check, a registration run, or a check to see if a person was wanted, they had to call the station via radio and wait for a dispatcher to do it. This could take several minutes depending upon how busy it was in the dispatch room.

One can't help but wonder if the Cranston officers of tomorrow will look at today's police vehicles the way the officers of the present view the patrol cars of the 1930s.



A two-seat Pulse Autocycle – circa 1986

The photo above was taken on Park Avenue near Dyer Avenue. The vehicle pictured is a Pulse Autocycle, and according to a website called Autocycles.org, only 360 were produced between the years 1984 and 1990.

Although the vehicle had nothing to do with the police department, the station did receive calls from time to time from people wondering about its legality for the road. Despite the lack of a front license plate, the vehicle was perfectly street legal.

Will the police cars of the future look like this?