



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The Potomac Police Department

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Image: Members of the Potomac Police Department in the 1920s included (l-r) Officer Lusby, Town Seargeant A. Fletcher Driscoll, Officer George Embrey and Officer Walter V. Wright. After the town was annexed by the City of Alexandria, the Potomac Police Department was dissolved and Offer Embrey joined the Alexandria police force. Photo, courtesy Amy Bertsch, Office of Historic Alexandria.

After the Town of Potomac (now Del Ray) was founded in 1908, it was authorized by the state to levy taxes, improve sanitation and roads, and enforce laws.

Initially, most of the police duties fell to an elected town sergeant. The sergeant was tasked with collecting taxes, rounding up stray dogs, and responding to reports of crime, such as break-ins and thefts. As motorized vehicles became more common, accidents caused by speeding cars also increased.

In 1915, the sergeant recruited several citizens to help him catch speeders. In one day they nabbed seven motorists who violated the 10 mph speed limit.

By the 1920s, the population of Potomac had grown so much that additional officers were needed. The town council appointed special police officers to control traffic, enforce laws and deal with Prohibition-related offenses. Prisoners charged with traffic and liquor law offenses were usually taken to the Alexandria city jail, while those arrested for assaults, robberies and other serious crimes were transported to the county jail in North Arlington.

Officers relied on motorcycles to get around and would transport as many as four prisoners in a sidecar. When the Potomac town hall was built in 1926, it also served as the fire station and jail, and the first prisoner held there was a Potomac man charged with drunk driving.



“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.