

How old is the Office of Sheriff, and how is a Sheriff different than a police officer ?

A Sheriff's Office and a Police Department are both law enforcing organizations. Both have the goal of providing public safety, but they differ in many ways.

One important difference is in their area of jurisdiction. A police department is responsible for law enforcement in a specific city, municipality, town or village. They are established under municipal regulations where the Chief of Police is appointed, and he or she hires other police officers and detectives to assist in policing that municipality, town or village. The Police Department also performs various public services such as safety education, school resource officers, and other security functions in their communities. As well, they often provide security at a mayor's court or municipal court within their jurisdiction. The first police department was established in Boston in 1838, followed by New York City in 1845.

However, the Sheriff's Office has a wider jurisdiction over the entire County. One of the functions of the Sheriff is providing law enforcement services/emergency response to the unincorporated areas (townships) in the County that do not have their own police departments. The Sheriff's duties are more expanded than a police department in the fact that besides law enforcement patrol he must: maintain the County jail; provide security to the Courts of Common Pleas (felony courts), Juvenile, Probate, and Domestic Relations Courts; transports thousands of prisoners each year to and from State prisons, holding facilities, courts, and extraditions from other States; is responsible for the service or delivery of legal documents that include court summonses, subpoenas, and law suits; conducts Sheriff's sales, evictions, repossessions, property appraisals, and the seizure and sale of property ordered by the courts; handles the CCW process for the County; registers and monitors all sex offenders, as well as arson offenders; heroin task force; detective bureau; SWAT, Marine Patrol, and other specialized services.

Unlike the Chief of Police who is appointed, the Sheriff is elected in Ohio every four years. The Office of Sheriff can be traced back over 1,000 years to England. Its roots began in 871 under King Alfred the Great. Alfred the Great created a new governmental

unit known as the "shire". It was the forerunner of the modern day "county". Each "shire" was led by a "reeve" (chief). It was the responsibility of the "shire-reef" to maintain law and order within his "shire" (county). In those early days there were no police, no judges, no magistrates, etc. The Sheriff did everything. He had the power to arrest, to raise armies, collect taxes, preside over courts, deal with traitors, and did everything on the King's behalf.

In the battle of Hastings in 1066 the Saxon King Harold was defeated by the Normans. The Normans centralized power under the King and it was the Sheriff who became the enforcer of the law throughout the Kingdom. Even after the despotic King John was forced to sign the Magna Carta restoring basic rights and freedoms in England, the Office of Sheriff maintained its critical importance of keeper of the peace. It should be noted that the role of Sheriff is mentioned nine times in the Magna Carta. In 1182 King Henry the 2nd commanded the shire-reef to open "gaols" to house prisoners until they could be tried by the King's traveling or circuit judges. Soon the shire-reef became the Sheriff, and gaols became the jails.

When the first colonies were established in Virginia in 1634 one of their first actions was to elect a Sheriff. Thomas Jefferson in his work called "*The Value of Constitutions*" stated that "*the Office of Sheriff is the most important of all executive offices of the country*". During the 1700's and 1800's American Sheriffs were given a broad range of responsibilities by colonial and state legislatures. Among the duties included maintaining jails and workhouses. The enforcement of law, maintenance of the peace, and the handling of criminals throughout the judicial process were responsibilities given to the Sheriff. As westward expansion evolved it was the Sheriff who was needed to establish order in the lawless territories where the fastest gun often ruled.

Today there are over 3,000 counties in the United States, and almost everyone has a Sheriff charged with maintaining order. Alaska is the only State in the Union where a Sheriff's Office does not exist. It is equally important to note that the Office of Sheriff was the first County Office created in the United States.

A little Ohio history connects the Office of Sheriff with the term Buckeye. The Office

of Sheriff was in place in Ohio prior to Statehood. Before Statehood was achieved in 1803 the Sheriff was appointed by the Colonial Governor. The first appointed Sheriff was Colonel Ebenezer Sproat in 1788 who covered the area of all of eastern Ohio from the Ohio River to Lake Erie. It was during this time that the Indians near Marietta coined the phrase “*He’s a Buckeye!*” when they saw Sheriff Ebenezer Sproat in a parade because he stood six feet tall and carried a drawn sword. When the Indians saw him in all of his gallantry they cried out “Heap Big Hetuk”, the Indian name for Buckeye. The nickname never left him and was gradually conferred on all Ohio citizens.

Today there are 88 counties in Ohio, and in each the Sheriff is the chief law enforcement officer.

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