

POLICING CRIMINAL PASTIMES

By Ellen Knight¹

“The duties of a police officer we find to be manifold and difficult,” wrote Police Chief Zanoni A. Richardson in 1878. During the prior year, the chief and his one regular officer made 125 arrests, including 26 for attending a cock fight, 21 for drunkenness or liquor law violations, and 15 for illegal fishing, plus arrests for other assorted crimes.²

Throughout the town’s history, the people of Winchester have had plenty to do for entertainment and recreation, but not all their choices have been legal.

For example, in 1923, the arrest of some dicers attracted the attention of the *Boston Globe* which printed a special dispatch reporting, “the clatter of galloping ivories in the boiler room of the Winchester Brick Company on Holton St. today drowned the crunch of wheels in which were Chief of Police William R. McIntosh and Sergt. Thomas F. McCauley. As a result 12 young men from this town and Woburn will have to step up and be interviewed by the judge of the local county next Wednesday evening.”³



Police Officers in 1910

Police in past times had the duty to curb various forbidden pleasures, including ousting minors from a pool room and breaking up ball games or parties on Sunday. This last difficulty with prohibited Sunday sports led even respectable residents to challenge the law.

SUNDAY SPORTS

During the early days of the Winchester Country Club, a controversy arose. The problem was Sunday golfing.

Though illegal in Massachusetts, Sunday golfing was overlooked for a time in Winchester. According to Henry Johnson, a former selectman who wrote to *The Winchester Star* in 1903, “The Board of Selectmen or a majority of Selectmen lack the moral courage to pass an order requesting the Police Department to stop it, and the press took up the matter, pro and con.

“Finally, the Chief said he would take the matter into his own hands and he very quietly sent word to the leaders of the club, that while playing golf on Sunday did not trouble him personally or his family, yet it was against the law and the next time he saw any person, no matter who they were, playing golf on the Winchester Golf Club grounds on Sunday that he should take their names and summons them into the District Court in Woburn for gaming on the Lord’s day.”⁴

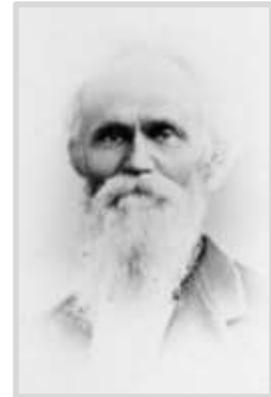
After Johnson suggested that the club had beaten the chief by laying out its course over the town line in Arlington, a correspondent signing himself “Mistick” wrote that considerable country club land lay in Winchester, “making it possible for Winchester’s bright and active Chief of Police to get in some excellent work on Sundays if he desires to as there are lively times on the Winchester side as well as on the Arlington.”

Ironically, the charges that Sunday golfing lowered moral standards were leveled against a club under the presidency of a minister. (The Country Club’s second president was a lawyer.)

The prohibition against Sunday games applied to all sports. According to the town history, in the days before the First World War there was a “strict moral embargo against Sunday sports. Yet, there were always some willing to break it, and in the early 1900s, a group of tennis buffs from the Wolcott Terrace area persuaded the Metropolitan District Commission to let them build a tennis court in the fastness of the Fells. There, on Sunday morning, the neighborhood’s men and young people would play. At noon their wives, mothers and sweethearts would bring sandwiches and beer. Safely hidden from the town’s prying eyes, they would eat a picnic lunch and exercise their forehands and backhands for a few more sets.”⁵

LIQUOR

During the late 19th century and most of the 20th, the town was “dry,” meaning the sale of liquor for profit was forbidden. However, in the town’s early years, a liquor agent was appointed to sell wine or spirits under certain restrictions. David Youngman, an apothecary who was agent in 1852, reported that he laid in forty gallons of rum but sold only five; that he bought twenty-nine gallons of brandy, gin, and wine and sold twenty-four; and that his total sales amounted to \$84.15.⁶ The agent in 1860, Hatevil Stanton, reported liquor sales of over \$700. The agency was abolished about 1865.



Hatevil Stanton

Having a liquor agent did not stem illegal liquor sales. Curbing this trade was the business of the Winchester Police Department.

During the 19th century, a few men did the work of keeping law and order in the town year after year. The first town bylaws allowed for two or more police officers, and two or three were often all the town had. In 1892, Chief J. Winslow Richardson reported, “The police force at the present time consists of a Chief of Police, who attends court cases, is the day officer, also Health Officer and Inspector of Provisions and Animals; and two night officers, besides one officer at the Town Hall who receives part pay from this department. More men are needed, as our town is growing fast.” These men were sometimes assisted by a varying number of part-time special officers.

Many duties of the first policemen sound familiar, such as patrolling the town and railroad; attending fires and public meetings; checking for unlocked buildings; making investigations and

arrests for such offenses as assault, theft, disturbing the peace, trespassing, vandalism, and immoral conduct; and enforcing the licensing of dogs, a persistent nuisance.

There was one duty which exceeded all others. "The sale of intoxicating drinks," Chief Richardson wrote in 1878, "is the greatest evil we have to contend with. During the past year our attention has been called to many places where intoxicating drinks were sold, and we have not infrequently found parties engaged in this unlawful traffic on the Lord's day. Some of these places we have succeeded in closing, while others have been confined to sales 'behind the curtain' to the young men of our town, some of whom were taught how to take their first step in iniquity, and when we gently endeavor to apply the law to this tippling shop, the cry comes, 'Oh! *Persecution, persecution!*' 'We sell only PRESERVES and tonic mixtures'; while the witness takes the stand and swears *he thinks* it was '*coffee*' he drank." During that year, the police seized 162 gallons of beer and mixed liquors.

Four years earlier, recently appointed Chief F. H. Johnson reported, "We soon found out that we had plenty to do, as a small part of the inhabitants of the town did not wish to be disturbed in their beer and rum drinking, and making a holiday of the Sabbath. Rowdies and roughs from adjoining towns thought Winchester a fine place to resort to on the Lord's day, for a good time, and for the first three months we had much trouble with this class of persons; but by a determined effort on the part of your Police to put a stop to this lawless kind or rowdeyism, and being well sustained by the inhabitants of said town, we believe we have succeeded in establishing as good order in this town as they have in any town in the country."

Winchester was dry; Woburn was not. Often the police had to escort intoxicated people home from Woburn. Year after year, arrests for drunkenness topped the charts, with additional arrests for "maintaining liquor nuisance" or violating the liquor laws.

At times special police were appointed to try to stem the illegal trade in liquor over the town lines. John Hemingway was especially diligent in this work. Shortly after his election he had raided 17 rum shops. Accompanied by a white mustang reputedly able to smell whiskey for a distance of 40 rods, he lay in wait to stop rum traffickers from entering town, for which he was once assaulted and nearly killed.

In 1880, pro-temperance sentiment was such that Town Meeting appropriated \$500 for the Board of Selectmen to spend on suppressing the sale of intoxicating liquor. But the selectmen did not spend the money. Rather, using the Police Department appropriation, they appointed three police officers and instructed them to enforce the law. "We did not deem it advisable to make use of so questionable a mode of obtaining evidence as to employ spies.... More good can be accomplished by not too much law but by a firm enforcement against open violators of law."⁷

Decades later, Prohibition was another era of intense police involvement in the war against illegal liquor. During this time, the Winchester Citizen's Alliance demanded that more be done to enforce the laws. Arrests for drunkenness rose from an annual low of 21 in 1920 to a high of 173

in 1924. Liquor raids also ensued. The first recorded raid occurred in September 1921 when police seized several bootleggers, a copper still, and 40 gallons of moonshine.

After repeal of Prohibition in 1933, Winchester exercised the local option left to it by state law to be “dry,” which lasted until the first license for a package store was issued in 1985.

TEMPERANCE SOCIETIES

“Rumseller, look out!
My course is laid;
My ship’s float,
My anchor’s weighed;
Look out ahead!
For I am bound
To cruise on
Your unholy ground!”

So reads, in part, the announcement of a Temperance lecture held in 1848 in the South Woburn vestry. In such dramatic terms the war against illegal and intemperate alcohol was waged in the last century by townspeople who attacked the liquor problem from another angle than that taken by the police, by persuading consumers to a life of temperance.

As early as 1838, Woburn, like most New England towns, had a temperance society. From 1847 to 1855 and 1858 to 1861 there was a chapter of the Sons of Temperance in South Woburn and Winchester, and a Town Temperance Society was founded in November 1851.

The Sons of Temperance held meetings devoted both to moral improvement and to social activities. One reforming lecture reported in the newspaper was given by Salem Wilder who pictured “the horrors of a drunkard’s life in vivid colors, following the bridegroom who reluctantly sipped the wine offered by the fair hand of her whom he had just sworn before high Heaven to love, cherish, and protect, from that fatal moment until he reaches the period when he is suffering the terrible horrors or raving delirium; and the poor, broken-hearted wife looking on and in the agony of her soul exclaiming this, this is my work, all, all, my own.”

One of the more successful socials was held in February 1860 at Lyceum Hall where tables were laid out for the sale of fruit, cake, and confectionery and for ice cream and oysters and where a program was offered including music, an antiquarian wedding, and supper. Reportedly, 700 attended.

Later temperance societies included the Reform Club, with 400 members, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, both organized in 1876. The former lasted 12 years, the latter more than twice that time. The women especially carried on active campaigns, not only among adults but also in the schools. Later, the Winchester Catholic Total Abstinence Society and the

International Order of Good Templars, Wedgemere Lodge, joined the roster of temperance groups.

In time, a Winchester branch of the Citizens Law & Order League was formed to assist the police in their work combatting the illegal liquor trade.

Temperance societies continued their endeavors until they saw liquor outlawed nationally. In Winchester, several temperance advocates attempted to hasten such a step during World War I. Along with other temperance unions, Winchester's urged national prohibition as a war measure, not only for sobriety but also to save grains for food. But the war was over before prohibition was enacted.

¹ This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in *The Winchester Star* on Oct. 5, 1989 and an article published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on April 8, 1994. This article supersedes all previous articles.

² Police Department Annual Report, 1878.

³ "Dicers Caught by Winchester Police," *Boston Daily Globe*, Mar. 12, 1923.

⁴ *The Winchester Star*, June 19, 1903.

⁵ Bruce Winchester Stone, *History of Winchester*, Vol. II, p. 30.

⁶ Reported in Henry Chapman, *History of Winchester*, Vol. I, p. 182.

⁷ Annual Report for the Financial Year ending Feb. 28, 1881.