



## **A Brief History of the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office**

by

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Captain**

The San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office has a rich history spanning from the "Old West" to the "Nuclear Age." Over the years, the personnel have dealt with many tragedies, enjoyed many successes, and has grown to provide a highly competent law enforcement service. Some of the events, that molded the agency into its present form, are described in the stories within this brief paper.

San Luis Obispo County was officially established on February 18, 1850, by legislative act and was one of the State's original 27 counties. California was then admitted into the union of the United States of America on September 9, 1850.

Measuring about 90 miles long and 64 miles wide when originally formed, the county comprised 3,284 square miles. For comparison, the county is three times the size of the State of Rhode Island.

The entire population of San Luis Obispo County in 1850, was 336. That included a total of 60 families and 53 dwellings. Its population comprised landlords and their employees on great ranches which covered a half a million acres.

An election was held on the first Monday of April in 1850, to fill the county's most important position, the Sheriff. Henry J. Dalley was elected as the first Sheriff of San Luis Obispo County. He resigned after one year in office citing a concern for the dangers of the business.

The county was divided into eleven townships in 1852. These townships were Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, Cholame, Morro, Nipomo, Paso Robles, San Luis Obispo, San Miguel, San Simeon, Santa Margarita, and Templeton. These townships were accepted as judicial districts for the appointment of a Justice of the Peace and Constable.

Only one legal execution took place in San Luis Obispo County. On August 23, 1859, a man was hanged for the murder of Francisco Alviso. Francisco Castro was the Sheriff and personally conducted the execution in the courtyard of the San Luis Obispo Mission. Sheriff Castro was paid a fee of \$20.00 for executing the sentence of death in addition to his salary.

Concerns were not so drastically different in



times past. An advertisement appeared in the December 14, 1893, issue of the Tribune for the Keeley Institute in Riverside. This Institute specialized in the cure of alcoholism and the opium habit. They claim to have cured 150,000 patients during the 13 years of operation. They also cited their endorsement by the United States Government and said they were in use by the National Soldier's houses.

A San Diego Deputy Sheriff, Will J. Ward, was fatally injured during the escape of a prisoner while on board a steamer ship at Port Harford (Port San Luis) on November 11, 1899. Deputy Ward was transporting a prisoner from San Diego by ship to San Quentin prison. The suspect had been sentenced to ten years in prison for a burglary in San Diego County. As the ship approached the port, the prisoner caught the Deputy off guard and struck him with vicious blows several times on the head with a heavy water bottle.

Deputy Ward remained in a coma for several days until he finally died. His remains were taken to Bowen's Undertaking Parlor where they remained until sent by steamer to San Diego accompanied by sorrowing relatives.

The suspect was eventually convicted on the murder of the Deputy Sheriff. On May 23, 1900, Judge Unangst sentenced him "to be

hanged by the neck until dead." Sheriff Ivins was ordered to transport the defendant to San Quentin prison and there, on July 26, 1900, he was hanged by the Warden.

On July 12, 1901, The Breeze newspaper reported that former County Supervisor John B. Kester was attacked with a butcher knife by Frank Hardie in Cayucos. The attack occurred as Kester was sitting in his wagon. Fortunately, bystanders interfered and disarmed Hardie. Under Sheriff McFadden went to Cayucos to search for Hardie. It was discovered that Hardie had shaved his beard and disguised himself in other ways and had probably skipped the county. Both men were highly respected in the community and Hardie was at one time the Constable of Cayucos. The attack was believed to have stemmed from a long time feud between the men over a woman.

Sheriff Ernest C. Ivins died on Wednesday, August 1, 1906, at his Marsh Street home in San Luis Obispo. Honest and upright, his career as a public official stands forth in the history of the county without a stain. He was twice elected to the Office of Sheriff and as long as his health permitted, he gave all his attention to the duties of the office.

Mr. Ivins had been in failing health for three years past. He spent more than a year in the



southern part of the state, but the battle

against that dreaded disease consumption (TB) could not be won.


The Tribune newspaper made the exclusive report on December 8, 1906, that Sheriff McFadden fired three shots at fleeing box car thieves. The Sheriff caught several men stealing liquor from a freight car in San Luis Obispo. When the shots were fired, they made a hasty departure and escaped. "A close watch is being kept and arrests are expected soon," according to the Sheriff and Peter Lewin, Chief Detective from the Southern Pacific Railroad.

A large posse was formed to conduct raids on

**YANCY McFADDEN**  
PRESENT INCUMBENT



DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE  
**FOR SHERIFF**  
Election Nov. 8, 1910

Ellsworth  & McCool

opium dens in San Luis Obispo, according to the December 13, 1911, issue of the Daily Tribune. Sheriff Younglove, Under Sheriff Ed Van Gorden, Deputy Hankerson, Chief of Police Cook, Constable Taylor, and Night Officer Alvares formed a ring of officials who arranged the raid on the "Chinese joints" where opium was reported to be smoked. The raid netted three arrests and the confiscation of opium and smoking outfits.

Bitten by the Christmas spirit, Sheriff Younglove's wife treated the inmates of the county jail to a fine dinner on Christmas Day in 1911. Mrs. Younglove took it upon herself to provide a dinner and it was a truly exceptional one for the prisoners. The menu included roast chicken, dumplings, mashed potatoes, brown gravy, baked beans, fruit and coffee.

Mr. A.C. Jenson, an Inspector from the State, arrived in San Luis Obispo on May 21, 1918, to examine the county jail. His assignment was to inspect and photograph all jails throughout California. The San Luis Obispo County Jail was known as one of the flimsiest in the state. A number of criminals had escaped by removing portions of the brick walls with the aid of a fork or toilet handle. Mr. Jenson asked the assistance of Under Sheriff Pond in holding a flashlight while he photographed the interior of the jail. The flashlight failed to work properly and some of the fluid leaked out causing severe burns to the Under Sheriff's right hand.

The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution was adopted on January 16, 1920. This amendment, known as the National Prohibition Enforcement Act, outlawed all intoxicating liquors.

As could be expected, seasoned drinkers ignored the new law that then occupied much of the local lawmen's hours. To assist in the

enforcement, the United States Treasury appointed Prohibition Officers who were also known as “revenueurs.” One of the local Prohibition Officers was John H. Vail who later ran unsuccessfully for the office of Sheriff upon the death of Sheriff Taylor.

The bootlegging of liquor became very commonplace on the central coast. Liquor was smuggled aboard railroad cars and by ships. Neither Canada nor Mexico had bans on alcohol, so both countries were eager to profit from the situation by selling their commodity here.

The controversy over the Eighteenth Amendment continued for 14 years. On February 16, 1933, the U.S. Senate finally voted to submit the Twenty-First Amendment which repealed the Eighteenth and ended the national prohibition.

On February 26, 1929, at 11:30 p.m., Sheriff Charles J. Taylor was killed in a single car traffic accident one mile south of Santa Margarita. The accident occurred in a county-owned vehicle as the Sheriff was traveling home from an official investigation in Paso Robles. The Sheriff’s vehicle was located off of the roadway in a ditch. He was slumped over the steering wheel with his head through the windshield.

The accident was investigated by Deputy Sheriff Harry Haskins and District Attorney A.E. Campbell. It should be noted that this accident occurred prior to the establishment of the California Highway Patrol in 1936. The cause of the accident was not determined. The county Coroner Ray F. Richardson reported that the chest was badly crushed, the head crushed, with the skull possibly fractured, and that either injury would have caused almost instant death.

Mr. Taylor had been a peace officer since

1907, when he became a member of the city police force, continuing in that duty until 1910 when he was appointed Deputy Sheriff. In 1911, he was elected Constable of San Luis Obispo township, holding the office until January 4, 1914, when he took the oath as Sheriff.

Jess P. Lowery, Chief Deputy under the late Sheriff Taylor was appointed to the Office of Sheriff by a special meeting of the Board of Supervisors held at the District Attorney’s Office.

Sheriff Lowery had been a resident of the county for six years, the past two as Chief Deputy under Mr. Taylor, and head of the Bureau of Criminal Identification and



Investigation of the county. Prior to entering the office here, Mr. Lowery was Sheriff Taylor’s Deputy at Pismo Beach.

“Red-Light”  
a b a t e m e n t  
actions were filed against four Pismo Beach residents, by District Attorney Van Wormer according to an article in the Tribune on March 1, 1935. The complaint alleges that the subjects own and operate a house of “ill repute.”

Another action concluded with the “padlocking” of another house at 400 Ocean View in Pismo Beach for violation of the state’s “Red-Light Abatement Act.” This judgment was filed by Judge T.A. Norton at



the office of Gwen Marshall, County Clerk.

The County Board of Supervisors voted on Tuesday, May 14, 1935, to enact a county slot machine ordinance. The new county ordinance required a license for slot machine owners that cost \$100.00 per year for an operator who had more than two machines. A person with two or less slot machines had to pay \$20.00 per year. Additionally, the law prohibited the use by persons under 18 years of age, and all machines had to be at least three hundred feet from a school. Violation of this ordinance could have resulted in a fine of up to \$500.00, or six months in county jail. The Friday issue of the Herald-Recorder, dated January 7, 1938, reported that the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office investigated the theory that rival dope gangs may be the answer to a series of mysterious attacks. The crimes included the beating of Douglas Riviera, a Morro Bay abalone diver, in front of the Sheriff's Office and a shot fired through a window at Frank Brebs.

Deputy Sheriff Les Bardin investigated the incidents that revealed that the attacks grew out of a gigantic dope smuggling ring along the coast with headquarters in Morro Bay. It was reported that the dope was thrown overboard in cans by Japanese oil tankers that anchor off Morro Bay, and the cans picked up by divers.

Federal and State Narcotics Investigators

assisted in investigating marijuana sales after a local arrest. State Narcotics Investigator J.W. Perry filed charges against three men who had been arrested by Pismo Beach Police for possession of marijuana cigarettes.

The ease with which the marijuana can be grown makes the problem of stamping out the smoking of "reefers," as the cigarettes were called, an extremely difficult one, according to officers in the October 7, 1938, edition of the Herald-Recorder.

Murray C. Hathway was elected Sheriff of San Luis Obispo County in November 1938, and was sworn into office on January 2, 1939. Sheriff Murray C. Hathway served as the County Sheriff longer than any other man. He was elected to four terms serving 16 years.



The Office of the County Coroner was abolished with those duties absorbed into the Sheriff's Office on January 1, 1955. One of the most published death investigations in this county occurred during the first year of the consolidated service, with the death of actor James Dean. Dean was killed in an automobile accident on September 30, 1955, near Cholame.

On June 9, 1961, Deputy David Harvey Stahl attempted to arrest a man suspected of



committing a series of crimes, including kidnaping. The incident occurred at 1:40 p.m., on Old River Road near Atascadero when the suspect was stopped. During the attempted arrest, Deputy Stahl was shot in the head. This occurred just hours before Stahl was to attend his daughter's graduation from Paso Robles High School.

The suspect was arrested and convicted of the murder of Deputy Stahl. He was sentenced to death and retried in 1964 due to a technicality and again sentenced to die. However, in 1966, the California Supreme Court reduced the conviction to second degree murder. He was then released from prison on parole in 1975, and freed from his parole in 1978.

In 1964, the Sheriff's Office consisted of 67 employees including all sworn and civilian positions. The office included the



Sheriff, one Under Sheriff, one Captain, four Lieutenants, seven Sergeants, one Civil Officer, 40 Deputy Sheriffs, five Matrons, four female Clerks, two female desk Dispatchers for substations and one Business Manager.

The first black and white Sheriff's patrol cars appeared in 1969 under the direction of Sheriff Mansfield. These Dodge Polara patrol cars were equipped with 440 cubic inch engines and fondly remembered as the fastest patrol cars ever used.

On May 17, 1969, Sheriff Mansfield opened the South County substation in Oceano. The station was staffed by one Lieutenant, one Sergeant, eight Deputy Sheriffs, and one Dispatcher/Clerk.

The main Sheriff's Office facility and Jail were moved to its own facility at Camp San Luis Obispo in 1971, by Sheriff Mansfield. The single-story block structure cost \$1,200,000 and was overcrowded shortly after completion. To relieve some of the space problems, the detectives were moved to a former military building next to the main facility. These buildings are both still in use today.

On January 6, 1975, the Office of the Constable was abolished by the Board of Supervisors. Those services were combined with the Sheriff's Office now providing the services of the Sheriff, Coroner, and Marshal's Departments.

The county's largest bomb exploded on the balcony of Casa del Sol at Hearst Castle on February 12, 1976. A joint investigation was conducted by the Sheriff's Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. The bomb, which caused several million dollars damage, detonated just seconds after a tour of



53 had left the building. Although no arrests were made, the bombing was linked to a terrorist group known as the New World Federation League.

The Coast Patrol Station and Communications Center were moved into the newly constructed P.G.&E. Emergency Operations Center next to the main facility in 1984.

Edward C. Williams was elected Sheriff-Coroner of San Luis Obispo County in November of 1986. Williams was sworn into office in January 1987.

The county's worst air disaster and mass murder occurred on December 7, 1987, near Old Creek Road and Highway 46, between Templeton and Cambria. The investigation was conducted jointly by the Sheriff's Office, the National Transportation Safety Board, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The team concluded that a disgruntled former airline worker had smuggled a pistol on board the aircraft. He then shot an airline executive who had sat on a disciplinary hearing panel which terminated the employee. The suspect then shot the pilot, resulting in the plane crashing. All 43 persons on board PSA Flight 1771 perished in the disaster.

The Sheriff's Office moved the Coast Patrol Station from the Emergency Operations Center in San Luis Obispo, to Los Osos on

Monday, April 3, 1989. Sergeant Greg Slane was the first commander for the station located at 2099 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The remodeled building was formerly occupied by the Tenth Street Gym.

On January 27, 1989, at the annual awards banquet, Sheriff Williams announced the adoption of a Sheriff's Office motto. The motto was the result of a contest sponsored by the Sheriff's Advisory Council. The motto, "Sworn to Serve", has been placed on all of the patrol cars.



Sheriff Patrick Hedges and members of the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office are justifiably proud of their heritage and accomplishments over the many years of service. As the oldest and largest law enforcement agency in the county, they are committed to providing the best possible service in order to preserve the quality of life.

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