



We Serve and Protect
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HISTORY OF STARS IN THE CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

By a City ordinance passed in 1855, the current Chicago Police Department was created. This ordinance stated that the men of this department would be "police officers for [the] City." This police force had eighty to ninety men working in three police precincts and using leather badges as their only means of identification. The leather badges were worn on their hats like the emblems worn by the Police of London whose police department was established in 1839. The Chicago precincts were North, South, and West, made up of the areas of land divided by the Chicago River.

The first police uniform was adopted in 1858 and required the use of a six pointed brass star. Mayor John Wentworth, who was elected mayor for two non-consecutive terms in 1857 and 1860, did not like the uniform of 1858 and went back to using the leather badge as a police identifier. There is some debate whether Wentworth designed the leather badge used by the City, but, if he did, that could be part of the motivation that caused a return to that symbol under his second administration. This second use of the leather badge lasted from 1860 to 1862 when the new shield put into use was in the form of a silver star.

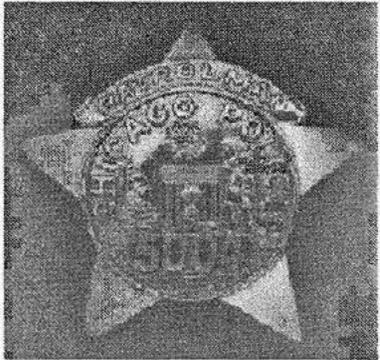
Under Municipal law Wentworth, as Mayor, was the head of the Police Department charged to "superintend and direct the police generally." In this capacity, and contrary to the ordinance of 1855 which established the structure of the police department, Wentworth refused to appoint a Captain for the department and issued orders directly "to the Lieutenants of the Divisions." In 1861, State law took the authority for superintending the police away from Wentworth. At that time, the State created the police board as a part of the City's government, while the power to control the police department was put in the hands of three new police commissioners (the Board of Police Commissioners). What the State did not do was change Wentworth's authority to hire and fire City employees. So, when Wentworth was leaving office in 1861 he fired the entire Chicago Police Department. After 12 hours without a police force, the board of police commissioners swore in new police officers, re-established the use of a police uniform, and ordered that the leather badge be replaced with a "silver shield."

Through the 1870's and 1880's police officers wore a large, six point star with "Police" stamped across the top, the star number in the center, and "Chicago" across the bottom. Ranking officers wore a smaller version of the star with the rank stamped across the bottom and "Chicago Police" in the top and center. Between 1889 and 1903, police stars were issued under the authority of City ordinance. These stars included the use of the old City of Chicago seal (similar to the center-device designed in 1837 and found in the center of the Mayor's Office seal of that time). A newer City seal was incorporated into the police stars starting in the 1920's.

After 1880 horse drawn wagons and, later, the automobile replaced some of the foot patrol functions of officers. And, in the early 1900's, stars for the titles of Messenger, Patrol Driver, Driver, and Chauffeur were created. In 1903, a six point star was officially adopted by the department and that design lasted until 1955 when it was replaced by the current five point star. Because of its size, the 1903 to 1955 star was nicknamed a "Pie Plate." During World War I, due to a shortage of police officers, a Police Reserve was organized. This reserve was used at parades and less dangerous assignments and was de-activated shortly after the war.

A Captain's star last used around the 1950's was unusual in that it was worn with two star points upward. Because of this it gained the nickname of "The Devil's Horns." The design element of putting ball devices on the points of the stars for high ranking supervisors goes back to star designs used late in the 19th century.

When the Chicago Park District Police merged with the Chicago Police Department in the 1950's, Park officers were given star numbers in the 11,000 star number range. This practice carried over to the star design change of 1955. The 1955 star design officially included the titles of Patrolman, Policewoman, Detective, Youth Officer, Gang Crimes Specialist, Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Captain. The Policewoman star was replaced with the title of "Patrolman" due to a 1970's lawsuit. In that suit the court allowed five women to retain the use of the Policewoman star until they were promoted or resigned; the last of those stars went out of service in 2001.



A unique star for Detectives was designed in 1989 and was put into service soon after. Prior to that time, the Patrolman's star was used by detectives. This Detective star was also the first time that enameling was used for a non-exempt sworn star. When the Detective star went into use, other units in the Investigative Services Bureau requested their own stars. As a result, Youth Officer and Gang Crimes Specialist stars were created.

The current gold exempt stars came into use after O. W. Wilson took over as head of the Chicago Police Department in 1960. These exempt-rank stars have five points with ball-tip devices with additional filigree in the design. Currently, only the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendents, and the Chaplains have stars with enameling in their stars.

Over time the Department has experimented with various star designs, most of which never made it into service. For example, at the encouragement of one of the Deputy Superintendents, in 1989, a complete set of Career Service stars was made in all copper. This proved impractical and was never used as a working service star. The newest design has bold lettering, a controlling serial number on the back, a reverse-side pebbled surface that creates a unique fingerprint, and it is copyrighted to allow for civil claims and damages against those who use the design without authorization.

