

## **DEPARTMENT HISTORY**

### **PROUDLY SERVING SINCE 1951**

The City of Merriam was formed in 1950, and on November 24, 1950, the first Merriam City Council meeting was held. During this first meeting, Mr. Carl Looper was appointed as the first Town Marshall. All of the new councilmen were commissioned as "law enforcement officers" for the city. In December of 1950, Merriam Ordinance #6 was passed, setting up provisions for Merriam's City Marshall. The newly commissioned councilmen "law enforcement officers" decided to order Police badges for themselves. They agreed to use the same traffic laws as the City of Fairway and set the official speed limit of the city at 25 miles per hour, set the two-hour parking fine at \$1.50 and passed a public drunkenness ordinance. The following persons were appointed as "volunteer" law enforcement officers for the City of Merriam: C.L. Curry, Joe Pflumm, Harold Arnspiger, Bennie Williker and Frank Mueller.

In February of 1951, the Johnson County Undersheriff gave a presentation to the city council on Police Procedure and Management. At the conclusion of his presentation he suggested that the council set up its own police department. It was decided that any police officer hired by the city should be sent to "police school" which was held twice a month at the courthouse. In April, City Marshall Carl Looper spoke with Deputy Sergeant Poffinbarger of the Johnson County Sheriffs Department to discuss police jobs. In May, two police officer candidates were put before the council to be considered for hire. The first, Perry Sarver, had 1 year of experience as an officer and 3 years in the military, and had his own police motorcycle with lights and siren. The second, John Conner had 6 years of experience with the Kansas City Missouri Police Department including one year as a plain-clothed officer. He had also worked 4 years as a railroad policeman. He also had his own car with a police light. These two men were the first full-time Merriam police officers. In July, the city council approved the purchase of a tear gas gun and the installation of a short wave radio into the City Marshall's personal car. They also hired a third officer, Richard Bales.

In February 1953, the City of Merriam hired Perry Sarver as its first police chief. One of the conditions of his employment would be that the city would furnish a residence as part of his salary. They allowed Chief Sarver to use the "rock house" located at 61st & Kessler. He would be allowed to use the house until the Interstate was built. (It is believed that this is the same house that George Merriam built for himself and his family in the 1800's. The City of Merriam was named after George Merriam.) In April, Merriam Volunteer Firemen Paul Pflumm and Glenn Rushton were given special commissions to assist the police department with joint arson investigations. In May, the police department was given the authorization to purchase a department riot gun, (price not to exceed \$50.00) and a revolving red light for a patrol car. The first Merriam police car accident occurred during this time, the damage to the car cost \$116.00. The Johnson County Sheriff, who was providing dispatching services for the department started charging \$20.00 per month for the first car and \$10.00 for every additional car that was in service. In October, the city council considered round-the-clock policing for Merriam.

In January of 1954, the salary for police officers was raised to \$250 per month and part-time officers were to be paid \$1.10 per hour. Police Chief Sarver presented the very first Annual Report of the police department to the city council and made a request to purchase a new 1953 police car. Charles Crawford and Wallace Little were appointed as "reserve night officers," in an attempt to get closer to 24-hour policing for Merriam. In June Police Chief Sarver presented his 1955 Operating Budget to the city council. It included: \$14,040 for salaries, \$1800.00 for gas and oil, \$600.00 for uniforms and equipment, and \$1500.00 for a new patrol car. A new Ford police car was purchased for \$2,073.00. In

November the council was asked to authorize the purchase of one pair of General Electric walkie-talkies for traffic enforcement purposes for \$450.00 to \$785.00. The salary structure for the police department was: Police Chief -\$350.00, Assistant Chief -\$300.00, 2nd Class Police Officer -\$275.00, 3rd Class Police Officer -\$260.00 and an "Auxiliary Man" would receive \$1.10 per hour.

In January 1955, the Merriam Police Department hired Raymond Ice as Assistant Chief/ Captain and Albert Curtis as a probationary police officer. In April, the citizens of Merriam elected a new mayor – Robert B Carberry. The roster of the police department at that time was as follows: Chief Perry Sarver, who also served as the building inspector for the City of Merriam, Assistant Chief Raymond Ice, Patrolman Carl Smith, and Patrolman Albert Curtis. However, the following month brought changes for the city. Chief Perry Sarver was terminated by the council. The mayor had promised the job to the Assistant Chief at the time, Raymond Ice. The council, however, did not agree with the Mayor and Raymond Ice was not promoted. This caused great embarrassment for Mayor Carberry, for he had given his word to Ice. The Mayor decided that he would give his official resignation to the council. The council would not except his resignation and so no action was taken. This left the police department without a Police Chief for a short time. In May, Mayor Carberry recommended that Jack Ralph Sherman be appointed as the police chief. He was appointed after a 3 to 2 vote by the city council. Sherman had three years experience with the Johnson County Sheriffs Department, before he was relieved of his duties by the Sheriff for possible unauthorized political activities. In October, the police department took delivery of a new Plymouth Police Duty automobile (this vehicle had to have a complete engine overhaul in December, 1955).

In January 1956, Johnson County Sheriff Norman Williams presented a problem with the radio system and requested that the city change radio frequencies on the GE Radio System. The police department hired three new "reserve" police officers and PO Carl Smith resigned. In February the department hired Bill Dixon as a probationary police officer but he resigned in April and was replaced by Auxiliary Officer Robert Holmes.

In May, Police Chief Sherman hired Jack Dodson upon recommendation from Johnson County Sheriffs Captain Lynn Thomas. Police Chief Sherman resigned his position a few days after hiring Dodson. In July, Jack Dodson was appointed as the new Chief of Police. In August, Charles Braselton was hired as a regular patrolman. Auxiliary Officers, Donald G. Ross, James Flavin, Robert W. Hale, Donald L. Dolton, Charles O. Burk and Vega M. Howell were appointed. Joseph "Big Mike" Donahue was promoted to sergeant.

In August 1957, Police Chief Dodson gave the city council a full report on the police chase that involved Sgt. Joseph Donahue. Donahue was injured in the chase, but the suspect was apprehended. The following month the first Driving Under the Influence of Drugs and or Alcohol ordinance was passed. By the end of December 1957, a new salary structure was agreed on. The Police Chief would receive \$450.00 per month, Sergeants would receive \$360.00 per month and the regular officers would receive \$320.00 per month. The new pay increase would go into effect on January 1st, 1958.

In May 1958, a discussion took place at the city council meeting about the traffic revenues being down for the year. It was concluded that "traffic in the city was well behaved in the past months," which they credited to an effective Police Department. The court revenue for April was \$273.00.

In 1959, the City of Merriam and the Merriam Police Department experienced several changes. In January, the police department got its first traffic radar unit from Monument Engineering for \$1295.00, but it was not put into service until November. In April, the Johnson County Sheriff informed the city council that the sheriff's office would no longer charge for the dispatch services. The department was then given permission to buy a new police car from Mission Motors for \$970.00. In May, at the city council meeting a number of police employees were reviewed for reappointment by the council. One of the employees was Sgt. Donahue. Councilman Edwin Durham moved to disapprove the appointment stating that Donahue, although capable, acted in a manner unbecoming of an officer, which was detrimental to the city. He further stated that the city could not afford a violent man on the force. A vote was taken and the motion passed 5 to 2. Chief of Police Jack Dodson pleaded with the council to reconsider Donahue's appointment, and the decision was delayed until June. In June, there was a lengthy discussion involving various opinions on the reinstatement of Sgt. "Big Mike" Donahue. When the council was through with their discussion they decided to reappoint Donahue for a year on a 4 to 3 vote. They also approved Officer Harold Luther to attend a week long Peace Officer's training school held at the University of Kansas. This school was held from July 27th through August 1, 1959. (Note there was no police academy in 1959) This was the only formal training that this officer ever received while a Merriam Police Officer. (A Merriam Police Officer today must attend 14 weeks of basic training and 12 weeks of field officer training, before they are allowed to work alone.)

A search was made to find out what happened to the city's first police officers. Unfortunately, no further information could be found. It's like they all just faded into history. Some of the other Merriam Police Officers went on to have long careers in Law Enforcement. Charles Brazelton retired from police work in 1994. Jack Dodson, former Merriam Police Chief, retired from police work in 1977. He later passed away in 1987. Joseph "Big Mike" Donahue, former Police Chief, was later terminated from his position for his involvement in a gambling scandal in 1968. After this, he eventually started a successful private investigation company called the Kansas City Bureau of Investigation. He later received a commendation as a member of the Security Task Force for the 1976 Republican Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. Mr. Donahue continued to work until health forced his retirement in 1996. He died that same year.

This was the beginning of what is now the proud Merriam Police Department.