

A BRIEF ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE

Michigan State Troops Permanent Force, 1917-1919:

Public Act 53 of 1917 authorized Governor Albert E. Sleeper, as chairman of the War Preparedness Board, to create wartime emergency units of Michigan State Troops to replace the National Guard for domestic security. Appointed as commanding officer by Governor Sleeper, Col. Roy C. Vandercook issued General Order #1 on April 19, 1917, officially organizing the Michigan State Troops Permanent Force of mounted units (troops) and dismounted units (motor companies).

Despite its legal title, the State Troops Permanent Force became more commonly known as the Michigan State Constabulary. Headquarters was established in portable wooden barracks on a 90-acre poultry research farm (loaned by Michigan Agricultural College) along the Red Cedar River near East Lansing just north of the present headquarters compound. The Constabulary guarded vital war production facilities and enforced state liquor prohibition.

Michigan State Police, 1919-1921:

Pleased with the Constabulary's wartime service, Governor Sleeper and the Legislature enacted Public Act 26 on March 27, 1919, establishing the permanent Department of Michigan State Police. Vandercook remained as commanding officer (with the rank of major) at the East Lansing headquarters post. Four mounted troops were each assigned responsibilities for a section of the state. Given full State Police authority, troopers enforced traffic and prohibition laws, patrolled rural areas, and conducted criminal investigations. Major Robert E. Marsh succeeded Vandercook as commanding officer in 1920.

Michigan Department of Public Safety, 1921-1935:

As part of a general state reorganization, Public Act 123 created the Michigan Department of Public Safety under the central control of the State Administrative Board on May 5, 1921. Effective June 1, the State Police became the Uniform Division of the Department of Public Safety. The department also assumed the former duties of the State Oil Inspector, the State Fire Marshal, and the Prohibition Section of the Food and Drug Department. Responsibilities for transferring prison inmates and supervising parolees were added later. Troopers continued to perform highway patrol, criminal investigations, and prohibition enforcement.

Vandercook returned with the new title of commissioner; Marsh stayed on as deputy commissioner. They first opened administrative offices in a small wing just off the Senate chambers in the State Capitol, but moved into the new State Office Building (Lewis Cass Building) in downtown Lansing in December, 1921. Uniform Division (State Police) headquarters remained at the wooden East Lansing barracks. Vandercook replaced the former troop system with a network of informal "district inspectors" to supervise the various State Police posts.

From 1923-1926, Commissioners Harry H. Jackson and Alan G. Straight (the only commissioners appointed from outside the department) placed control of all posts directly under the Uniform Division superintendent, Capt. Caesar J. Scavarda. Appointed from within the ranks in 1926, Commissioner Oscar G. Olander continued this system for several years.

Uniform Division headquarters and the East Lansing Post moved into the new Mapes Hall on land leased from Michigan State College just south of the original Constabulary site in 1929. In late 1931, Commissioner Olander divided the state into the present system of eight administrative districts, each under the command of a captain. Completion of the present Administration Building in 1932 consolidated all Department of Public Safety offices at East Lansing.

Michigan State Police, 1935-1965:

Public Act 59 of 1935 (known as the State Police Act) reorganized the Department of Public Safety as the independent Department of Michigan State Police on May 17, 1935. This act established the present basic State Police authority. The department also came under the protection of State Civil Service and a pension act for the first time. Reappointed as State Police Commissioner, Olander received protection from political pressures; appointed by the Governor, he could only be removed from office for cause by the State Supreme Court. Act 59 did not provide for a deputy commissioner, so the Uniform Division superintendent acted in that role.

From 1935-1941, the State Police embarked on a major building program to replace the hodge-podge of rented barracks with a network of standardized, brick posts. Federal construction grants from the depression-era Works Progress Administration (WPA) soon made the Michigan State Police the best-housed department in the nation. Architect A.N. Langius designed the now-familiar structures in three sizes: district headquarters, standard, and sub-station. State WPA administrator Louis Nims cut through the bureaucratic red tape to keep the federal grants and state funds flowing.

Donald S. Leonard succeeded Olander as commissioner in 1947, and Joseph Childs served as commissioner from 1952-1965.

Michigan Department of State Police, 1965-1992:

Michigan's new 1963 state constitution reduced the number of principal state agencies to not more than 20. Public Act 380 of 1965 and the pertinent executive order established the reorganized Michigan Department of State Police effective November 1, 1965.

Headquarters remained at East Lansing, but the new commissioner, Fred Davids, received the new title of director with the enlisted rank of colonel. The director is appointed by, and serves at the pleasure of, the Governor. The former titles of superintendent and inspector were replaced by those of deputy director (lieutenant colonel) and uniform division commander (major).

Michigan Department of State Police directors have included Col. Fred Davids (1965-1970), Col. John R. Plants (1970-1974), Col. George S. Halverson (1974-1977), Col. Gerald L. Hough (1977-1987), Col. R. T. Davis (1987-1991), and Col. Michael D. Robinson (1991 to the present).

The department's present organization includes three bureaus under the Office of the Director: the Uniform Services Bureau, the Investigative Service Bureau, and the Support Services Bureau. The Uniform Services Bureau administers the eight State Police districts, including all posts, teams, and detachments.