

THE LOWDOWN

Thank you for reading this, my first column for the News of Orange. I am humbled every day by the trust the voters placed in me when they first elected me as the county's 47th Sheriff in 2014, and when they reelected me in 2018.

Obviously, I find law enforcement interesting and engaging – I chose to make it my life's work. Each month, through this column, I will attempt to give readers a behind the badge look at what, why, and how we do what we do in the Orange County Sheriff's Office. Let me know your interests - I can write about philosophy, a day in the life, our K9 team, equipment costs, NARCAN, the anatomy of an eviction, how we interface with 911, and much more.

This week, I thought I would start with a little specific history about the Orange County Sheriff's Office and some general information about the office of the sheriff.

In the 267-year history of Orange County, 45 people have taken the oath of office as sheriff (two served twice). Many terms were short. In fact, two sheriffs started and ended their service in the same year: John Hawkins in 1780 and E. H. Ray in 1867. Moreover, it took 22 sheriffs to cover the first 47 years of law enforcement in the county. By contrast, I am only the third sheriff elected in the last 61 years! Voters elected me after Sheriff A. Lindy Pendergrass, the county's longest serving sheriff, decided not to seek re-election after 32 years. Prior to that, C.D. Knight was sheriff for 24 years – I began my career working for him.

Formed in 1752, Orange County takes its name from William of Orange V of England, the land grant holder. It originally consisted of what we now know as Orange, Alamance, Durham, Chatham, Caswell and Person counties. The Orange County Sheriff's Office began that same year. Alexander Mebane was the first sheriff, serving from 1752-1754. The town of Mebane, originally incorporated as Mebanesville in 1881, bears his name.

The concept of a sheriff stretches back through time; one of the earliest mentions is in the Bible, where sheriffs acted as supervisors for King Nebuchadnezzar. The responsibilities of sheriffs carried over to England when King Alfred the Great divided the land into "Shires" and appointed "Rieves" to oversee them. Eventually "shire rieves" became "Sheriff." In those days, a sheriff administered the law, assembled armies, apprehended offenders, and passed on information (initially by word of mouth) about criminals to neighboring jurisdictions.

The Office of the Sheriff made its way across the ocean and into the new world. One of the first acts decided on by the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts was the formation of a Sheriff/Constable for the settlement. The Sheriff was an officer of the court, collector of public taxes and private levies, keeper of prisons, and the public hangman.

As the thirteen colonies became the United States, the Office of Sheriff reflected the new government's design. North Carolina in 1776 was one of many states that put the position of Sheriff

into their state constitution. Of course, at this point, Orange County had already established the office 24 years earlier! Once the position was in the state constitution, voters elected the sheriff and he or she was no longer appointed by the King or Governor. The sheriff is in the unique position of being active in all three branches of the criminal justice system: law enforcement, the courts, and corrections.

It is important to realize sheriffs' offices did not exist in the way we think of them today until the mid-19th century. Citizens used to be legally bound to be ready at the command of the sheriff to help arrest felons. You may be familiar with the concept of a posse from watching westerns on television; a sheriff would deputize ordinary people to help apprehend criminals. People acting on behalf of the sheriff in such situations were subject to the same protections and consequences that the sheriff faced, yet they had no training or experience. People who did not serve when commanded were subject to fines. Today, highly trained deputies assist me with my duties. I am grateful I do not have to grab people off the street every time someone calls 911!

I look forward to this monthly chance to give you the lowdown. Please suggest ideas for future columns by emailing my Public Information Officer at astemper@orangecountync.gov. Thank you!