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Crime Pays: The Role of Prohibition and Rum Running along US 112 in the Transformation of the Michigan State Police

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Crime Pays: The Role of Prohibition and Rum Running along US 112 in the Transformation of the Michigan State Police

Abstract

The Michigan State Police were first organized to protect the state's infrastructure and quell labor disputes during World War I. Structured along the lines of a paramilitary organization, the State Police quickly developed a reputation for Nativism and anti-radical agendas. By the 1930s, the force had transformed into a state wide investigation and policing agency with broad support in the population and state government. Here, archival records and police publications are used to ascertain the role of Prohibition and rum running in the force's transformation.

Examination begins with an overview of the national movement to establish state policing agencies, and its roots in nativism. The effects of prohibition in the incorporation of heavy weapons, new tactics, and technologies taking place during this period are also discussed. Most important to the State Police's transformation was its changing public opinion, allowing it to expand in the face of labor opposition.

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Crime Pays:
The Role of Prohibition and Rum Running
Along Us 112
In the Transformation of the Michigan State
Police

By

Timothy Weber

A senior thesis submitted to the
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Crime Pays:
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Senior Honors Thesis

ABSTRACT

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Examination begins with an overview of the national movement to establish state policing agencies, and its roots in nativism. The effects of prohibition in the incorporation of heavy weapons, new tactics, and technologies taking place during this period are also discussed. Most important to the State Police's transformation was its changing public opinion, allowing it to expand in the face of labor opposition.

I

INTRODUCTION

Within the first twenty-five years of the Michigan State Police, its force underwent a dramatic transformation and expansion. It was originally formed along a paramilitary model, mounted on horses, to take the place of the National Guard regiments fighting in Europe during the First World War. It was designed to initially protect the infrastructure and quell labor disturbances, but was kept alive after the end of the war as a form of state police in face of opposition from labor supporters outside of and within the state government. By the mid-1930s, it had developed into a statewide policing and investigation force.

One of the reasons the force was able to evolve without being disbanded or strictly framed as a traffic enforcement agency, as many state's were, was its actions during prohibition, dealing with the US 112 trunkline and the emerging criminal element transporting liquor across the state. This provided an opportunity to expand resources wisely and geographically, develop new tactics and introduce heavy weapons, while legitimizing itself in

the eyes of the public and lawmakers. The unique situation of the cross state route allowed for the State Police to combat rum runners in the higher populated southern area of the state while at the same time have enough troops to man the posts in less populated northern and rural areas. Additional opportunities presented by the prohibition rum running was the chance to retain the force's earlier anti-foreigner agenda while at the same time showcase it's professionalism dealing with criminals and the public.

Once the United States entered World War I, the country was put on alert and began to conduct business in the state of war. With Michigan's abundant natural resources and established industrial base in Detroit, the state would play an essential role in the country's war production. A large immigrant community was also in the state, drawn by an emerging industrial base and the Upper Peninsula's mining districts. This caused many to believe there was a need to worry about any possible acts of sabotage and espionage on the states vital infrastructure.¹ Governor Albert Sleeper convened a War Preparedness Board to set up a home defense. Out of these early meetings, the Michigan State Troopers, or Michigan State Constabulary, was formed.

Initially composed of three hundred men total, the State Troopers were consigned to aid local law enforcement, protect the state's infrastructure, and to quell any possible labor riots, particularly in the UP mining areas where acts of IWW agitation were taking place. Within twenty years, the Michigan State Constabulary had morphed into a statewide criminal investigation and traffic control police force consisting of over 3,000 troopers and civilian staff.

There were many factors that played a role in the force's transformation. The labor radicalism of the first two decades began to wane, allowing the State Police to redirect their attention onto criminal matters. The expansion of roads dictated the types of policing the force would conduct and directed the use of funding. All, along with the enforcement of prohibition, affected the course of the State Police. Prohibition's role, in particular, was a strong force dictating the overall goals and means of the State Police. The expansion of criminal acts and the changed perceptions of lawbreakers associated with prohibition widened the vision of state troopers in their quest to subvert criminal activity. This paper is concerned with a specific area of prohibition and its attempted enforcement: the transportation of liquor

imported from Canada along trunkline U.S. 112 to the emerging organized crime area of Chicago.

Shipments of liquor traveling to the Chicago area across Michigan's lower two tiers of counties following U.S. 112 had a profound effect on the placement of State Police posts, policing tactics, the force's overall expansion, and the later legitimization of a state's policing agency in the eyes of the lawmakers and the citizenry.

Note for Chapter I

¹ Phillip P. Schertzing, "Against all Enemies and Opposers Whatever: The Michigan State Police Crusade Against the "Un-Americans" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1999), 99-101.

II

Development of the State Police

Movement to Establish the State police in the United States

The movement establishing state police agencies derived from progressive era reforms which pushed for greater professionalism and more centralized bureaucracies. The majority of state police forces were established in the first three decades of the twentieth century. In H. Kenneth Bechtel's State Police in the United States: A Socio-Historical Analysis, the movement to establish state police has been split up into four separate periods: the 1830s to 1900, 1900 to 1910, 1910 to 1921 and 1929 to 1941.¹ During the first period from 1830 to 1900, four states -- Texas, Massachusetts, Delaware, and South Carolina -- established some form of state police. These were usually specialized forces attached the attorney general, often consisting of only 10 to 30 men except in the case of the Texas rangers which at one point numbered over 250 men. They were commissioned for such purposes as border patrol, frontier protection, or to enforce specific vice and liquor laws.² The four state police forces were each born out of unique situations with different structures, agendas, and

powers. Since they were commissioned through the governor or attorney general they were often subject to disbandment once the opposition parties came into power, often only to be commissioned again. The problem of being involved in partisan clashes would persist for many of the state police forces later organized.

The second period from 1900 to 1910 also saw just a handful of states organize various forms of state police forces. The special case during this period though was the Pennsylvania Constabulary which was modeled after a paramilitary form.³ Consisting of over 220 horse mounted troops, its purpose was to enforce all laws throughout the rural areas of the state, which was made possible by its large size. Only two of the other four states which organized forces during this period followed the Pennsylvania model; New Mexico and Nevada. Connecticut and Arizona followed the same lines of the earlier period with forces numbering under fifty men with more directed purposes of patrolling the mining sections of the states.

The use of the state police in various states to protect mining interests quickly began to be tied together, particularly those forces aligned along the Pennsylvania model fashioned in a military manner with the requisite ranks, mounted horses, and the use of barracks enabling

them to work together and control large gatherings of people. The Pennsylvania model later became the ideal structure for State Police forces. Its military structure allowed for it to more easily take the place of the departed National Guard during the war. ⁴

The Michigan State Police, initially called the Michigan Constabulary force, was commissioned during the third period from 1910 to 1921. It followed the structure first set forth in Pennsylvania, mounted on horses, with complete freedom to enforce all state laws and warrants. During the third period of state police organization, twenty-three states formed some sort of law enforcement agencies. About half of these were modeled after the Pennsylvania Constabulary. States such as New York had previously tried to organize a mounted State Police but had been unable to because of opposition from labor interests because of their fear that it would be used in labor disputes. ⁵ The remaining states organized their state police along the earlier path of smaller specialized forces.

Activity during the mid-twenties centered on a shift within the movement. Four states organized police forces while three attempted for the second time. The four successfully initiated were all commissioned as "highway

maintenance police.”⁶ This development continued during the fourth period set forth by Bechtel, 1929-1941, when fifteen states formed their own state police. This was the period of massive highway expansion which led to thirteen of the states to organize the police as strictly highway patrols. Also during this period, more states tried to organize state police for the second or third times, having previously failed to pass the bills in their respective houses. Over 80 percent of the state police organized during this period were strictly along the lines of highway enforcement, four other states placed restrictions to make their own state police forces into highway patrols, moving away from the previous period’s focus on military constabulary style forces.⁷ By 1941 every state had established some type of law enforcement agency either following the Pennsylvania model, as a highway patrol, or small, specific purpose forces from earlier periods.

Starting at the turn of the century, a movement to organize statewide law enforcement agencies began slowly building steam eventually peaking in 1935. Every state would have some sort of agency by 1941. There were distinct periods throughout the four decades that saw different organizational styles and directives for each. Though every state would eventually have a force, the push

to do so was not without opposition. Because of the constabulary model employed in mining and manufacturing states such as Nevada, New York, West Virginia, and Michigan, labor leaders and their political backers began to oppose the creation of state police. Many states had to try repeatedly to organize state police forces but because of the importance placed on protecting mining installations and the organizational style that resembled a state-run standing army, they were not able to or were limited to highway enforcement. Contributing to this was the nation's renewed fear of foreigners and the surge in nativism. This fear was not without reason. The various state police were often used in labor disputes, and there was reason to accuse some police groups as nativist in organization. In this, Michigan was no different.⁸

Nativism within the State Police

In 1918, the Michigan State Constabulary was headquartered in East Lansing on the grounds of the Michigan Agriculture College, now Michigan State University. There were four other troop headquarters positioned in Detroit, Flint, and Adrian in the southern

portions of the Lower peninsular and at Negaunee in the Upper Peninsula. There were also nine detachments; one in Bessemer on the western border of the UP; three in the central area of the state (Muskegon on Lake Michigan; Midland near Benton Harbor in the Thumb; and in Port Huron on Lake Huron). The five remaining were stationed within the lower two tiers of counties -- South Rockwood and Monroe near Detroit; Jackson in the center of the state; and Lawton and Niles in the far southwest corner.⁹ The placement of these posts was a strategic move. Both the Upper Peninsula posts were within close range of the copper and mining areas in the west. The Flint and Detroit headquarters along with the two detachments in the southwest portion of the state were near or within the industrial and immigrant centers. Jackson's post was across the street from the State Prison while the Muskegon and Midland posts were in two of the state's growing population centers. Even though most of the posts were in areas with large numbers of people, there were other cities and counties within the state that could have warranted their own detachment or post. Kent County's population was 183,041 in 1920, whereas Muskegon's, some one hundred miles to the east, was a little more than one third of that at 62,362.¹⁰

Urban centers did not warrant a post strictly on the number of people, though population would be an important factor since one of the early held precepts for starting State Police forces was rural crime protection.¹¹ That is not to say they were placed only in rural areas where there were large numbers of rurally dispersed citizens. Troop placements were often near communities that had mining or manufacturing operations. The Pennsylvania paramilitary model was aptly suited to crowd and riot control because of its structure and training the troopers received, perhaps without coincidence many were often veterans, which instilled a sense of discipline and strict top down management. Troopers mounted on horses were an effective way to move and control large crowds of people. Troop placement was partly done, therefore, in a strategic form. Since rural protection was a driving force, posts were not automatically placed in cities but in the larger manufacturing areas and Northern mining communities. Usually, communities with significant immigrant populations often warranted posts. Immigrants, specifically those viewed as being "left" or "radical" were considered particularly dangerous, especially in the early years of the force.¹² The Michigan State Police was initially formed during World War I when the heightened levels of

nationalism, 100% Americanism, and nativism was where driving forces and provided the foundation. Different periods of nativism and fear of "reds" and "leftists," would continue to persist until the mid seventies.¹³

The opportunity to continue to harbor an anti-foreigner bias was shown during Prohibition. Fueling the calls for the temperance movements was a fear and dislike of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, often Catholic. Drink, slums, and the laboring classes all began to be tied to the issue of immigration. In particular, alcohol became a lightning rod for Anglo-Saxon Protestants fear that the country's "Americanism" was being thinned out within the population.

Prohibition in Michigan

On August 11, 1921, a magistrate in Windsor, Canada ordered that the Ottawa government had no legal recourse to stop the export of liquor to foreign countries or provinces.¹⁴ This ruling effectively opened the Detroit River for the business of liquor smuggling. There is no way to know the exact amount of liquor that was smuggled into the United States across the river, for the estimates are greatly varied. One article in the New York Times

Magazine from June 5, 1927 said, "official estimates place the amount of smuggling there at \$40,000,000 last year."¹⁵ In a later article dated June 11, 1929, the Times stated that 85 percent of the liquor smuggled between Canada and the United States came across the Detroit River.¹⁶ Much of the liquor was then spread out through Detroit to the countless speakeasies and customers, although some of it was consigned to the Capone organization among others in Chicago, usually through one of the most notorious gangs in the Detroit area, the Purple Gang.

Trying to stem the flow of liquor across the Detroit River was a battle that law enforcement would continue to fight and lose until the repeal of the Eighteenth amendment. The activities of the federal government, State Police and the Detroit Police in their attempts to curb the flow of smuggled liquor have been well documented.¹⁷ Smugglers used a wide array of ingenious tactics to transport liquor across the river. Thousands of personal crafts, transport ferries, the Ambassador Bridge and even underwater cables were all used among the many other strategies and devices.¹⁸ The overall volume of smugglers, the length of river that needed to be patrolled, inadequate numbers of law enforcement officials, and relatively light punishments all combined to make the task of stopping the

inflow of illegal liquor almost impossible. Regardless, the newly formed Michigan State Constabulary joined the growing numbers of officials trying to do just. They soon realized it would be more important to learn how to deal with the liquor once it reached the western banks of the river and beyond.

Rum Running Along US 112

The U.S. 112 trunkline went west out of Detroit into Ypsilanti and veered south by southwest once it passed Ann Arbor. It extended down into the bottom tier counties passing through the Irish Hills area south of Jackson, and then progressing through the Hillsdale and Coldwater communities. There, it began to run parallel to and about twenty miles north of the Michigan-Indiana state border, eventually passing through White Pigeon and Niles. This path was one of the most common routes taken by liquor smugglers on their way to Chicago. Estimates of the amount of liquor involved vary, but some law enforcement officials put the amount at 50 car loads each night traversing the trunkline.¹⁹ Other popular routes exited out from Detroit, heading through Lansing on to Lake Michigan.

The population in the southern portion of the state was quite concerned over the liquor question and immigration issues, both of which comprised a large portion of the State Troopers' resources through the enforcement of prohibition and their labor disturbance duties. Many of the feelings for temperance and Nativism apparent during the mid nineteenth century would rise up again during the early portions of the twentieth century. Local option for dry laws was made possible in 1887 by the state legislature.²⁰ Many of the counties in the southern area did opt for this numerous times. Van Buren County passed six straight local option laws starting in 1890, St. Joseph since 1908, and Lenawee since 1910. Counties such as Jackson, Cass, Hillsdale, Calhoun, Branch and Berrien had several separate votes at different periods, often local option passed or failed by small majorities.²¹

The area was also one of the strongholds of the Klu Klux Klan during the early twenties, especially in the cities of Adrian, Niles, and Jackson. Earl E. Michener, a state congressman from Adrian's district, put the number of Klansmen in Jackson County alone at around 5,000 in 1924.²² The Klan or Klan sympathizers often aided local officials by identifying people who broke prohibition laws.²³ The Klan was seen by many to be upholding up Protestant morals

and the law by doing so, but as the Klan began to be increasingly viewed as vigilantes, their help in prohibition's enforcement was not so appreciated as before.

The area around US 112 was one of the more populated sections of the state. At the same time, it was also one of the Republican Party's areas of strength. Prohibition was an issue that many felt strongly about. Combined with the presence of the Klan, prohibition and the rum running through the area were of high interests to many.

The area was uniquely well suited to provide a setting that helped shape and transform the State Police. Among the earliest changes were the tactics and weapons developed to respond to the rum running along US 112.

Notes For Chapter II

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- ¹ H. Kenneth Bechtel, State Police in the United States: A Socio-Historical Analysis (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 25-49.
- ² Bechtel, 31-37.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 37-38.
- ⁴ Insp. Phillip P. Schertzing, Preserve, Protect and Defend: An Illustrated History of the Michigan State Police in the Twentieth Century (Paducah, Ky.: Turner Publishing Company, 2002), 43-46.
- ⁵ Bechtel, 39-40
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.
- ⁸ Schertzing, "Against All Enemies and Opposers Whatever," 158-59.
There were not any Russian, Finnish, or ethnic Slav troops on the early rolls with only one Italian at that. Looking for new recruits, the force called for men of "First-class character." Letter written to The Coldwater Reporter on July 18, 1919, calls for an ad to be placed titled, "Join the State Police." Records 90-24, Box 14, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing.
- ⁹ Insp. Phillip D. Schertzing, Preserve, Protect and Defend: An Illustrated History of the Michigan State Police in the Twentieth Century (Paducah, Ky.: Turner Publishing Company, 2002), 68.
- ¹⁰ United States Historical Census Browser, (University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center. On-line, 1998) [database online]; available from <http://fisher.lib.Virginia.edu/census/>
- ¹¹ Bruce Smith, The State Police: Organization and Administration (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925), 7-12.
- ¹² "The Evil of the Itinerant Alien," State Trooper (October, 1920), 31,35.
- ¹³ Schertzing, "Against all Enemies and Opposers Whatever," 377-92.
- ¹⁴ Larry Engelmann, Intemperance: The Lost War Against Liquor (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 74.
- ¹⁵ Copy of original article. Box 27, Arthur J. Tuttle papers, 1888-1944, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan
- ¹⁶ Phillip P. Mason, Rumrunning and the Roaring Twenties: Prohibition on the Michigan-Ontario Waterway (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1995), 164.
- ¹⁷ C. W. Hunt, Booze Boats and Billions: Smuggling Liquid Gold (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1998); Mason; Engelmann, Larry. Intemperance: The Lost War Against Liquor (New York: The Free Press, 1979).
- ¹⁸ Mason, 44-46.
- ¹⁹ Engelmann, 152.
- ²⁰ Willis F. Dunbar and George S. May, Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 470.
- ²¹ Michigan Official Directory and Legislative Manual (Lansing: State of Michigan, 1919), 350-359.
- ²² Letter from Earl Michener, (state congressman representing the Adrian area,) to Henry V. Michener, 24 February 1924, typescript in Calvin Enders, comp., Ku Klux Klan Collection, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI.

²³ Fiery Cross: Michigan Edition, 16 November, 1923. Headline of article states: "Sheriff a Busy Man at Coldwater, MI." The article discussed how the local klavern members had been aiding the sheriff for the past few weeks in the apprehension of bootleggers and gambling houses.

III

Expansion and Testing of New Tactics and Weapons

Introduction of the Radio

One of the first examples that run running along US 112 opened up new opportunities to test and expand police tactics was the introduction and expansion of the practice of using radios to connect the various posts and detachments to headquarters and, later, from post to car and car to car.

Before the use of radios, troopers used the public telephone lines. They received priority from the operators, to the point of leaving the information about where they were and where they would be in case headquarters needed to reach them.¹ The bill for trooper telephone use could become quite high, around three hundred to four hundred dollars a month, which the various headquarters would have to offset by oil inspection fees.² The Detroit Police Department offered an answer to the problem of communication within the State Police. The DPD was one of the very first law enforcement agencies to take advantage of radios to connect their offices and patrol

cars. After seeing the usefulness of the new technology in law enforcement, the Michigan State Police began to set up a state wide radio system.³

The radio system consisted of thirteen stations and was often used to apprehend bank robbers who had taken to fleeing in cars after committing their crime. Radio alerts would go out from headquarters directing the troopers to set up coordinated road blocks. Alternative uses were quickly found and perfected. In one instance, two troopers used their radios to setup a scheme to stop a bootlegger who was making the Detroit-Chicago run. He had been using a smoke screen to evade the chasing patrol cars. The two troopers affixed a smoke machine to one of their cars and stationed it down the road. When the first car began chasing the known bootlegger, he radioed the second to begin a smoke screen to force the bootlegger to stop, or at the very least, dramatically slow down. Even though the plan worked and the bootlegger was forced to a stop because of the fog covering the highway, it also allowed him to escape sight unseen, leaving a car well stocked with liquor behind.⁴

Radios would soon become a common and necessary accessory to a trooper's arsenal. The experiences along US 112 did not only make the radio useful but gave the state

police a platform, among others, where different technologies that were rapidly becoming available could be used, tested, and perfected. Within a year of the radio's introduction in Detroit, cities and departments across the country were sending representatives to observe its use.⁵ Considered at the time by some police to be the greatest development of the decade, the radio and other new technologies were dramatically altering how police work was and could be done.

Use of Heavy Weapons

Even before national prohibition had taken effect, Michigan's own state prohibition laws were causing many in the Detroit and Hamtramck area to find new sources of liquor. Toledo, in the northeast corner of wet Ohio, was within sixty miles and connected by paved roads and interurban railways. The casual smugglers taking a few pints for themselves and for their close friends were quickly beginning to be overshadowed by the emergence of organized smuggling gangs such as the Billingsley Brothers.

Possibly the most famous and largest of the liquor smugglers of the time, at one point they controlled a virtual monopoly of liquor smuggling along the Michigan-Ohio border.⁶ Once the crime and its publicity started to

careen out of control, the State Police stepped up their enforcement of the border. During one of the many exchanges of gunfire, troopers fired on a car that had refused to stop at a blockade because the rumrunners in the car feared hijackers.⁷ Lawmakers quickly stated that there was no authorization for law enforcement officials to fire their weapons to enforce prohibition. This dispute was soon settled allowing the officers to use their weapons, but new tactics emerged to try to stop suspected rumrunners. In another instance, troopers devised a scheme to stop cars from running checkpoints. If a car did not stop, the troopers would signal down the road to a second group of troopers who would then lower a telephone pole across the highway. The tactic was quickly deemed to be inappropriate by government officials in Lansing even though it worked quite well.⁸

Although the State Police were dealt conditions that were arguably impossible to control, they were also questioned about whether they should use all means necessary to enforce the law. The U.S. 112 route allowed the State Police a new context to expand and test various tactics that were more readily accepted with expansion of violent gangs, hijackers, and the area's association with organized crime.

The bootleggers themselves were not the only criminal element traversing the area. Hijackers quickly became just as violent, if not more so, often impersonating the police.⁹ "Honest" bootleggers began to fear the hijackers drawn to the large amounts of money involved in the business. Many of the bootleggers considered themselves to be almost gentlemanly in their business, to the point of considering it a legitimate profession.¹⁰ Even though the Troopers had found ingenious ways to combat rumrunners, they had been consistently beaten off by countless bootleggers and rum caravans with the use of machine guns. Multiple cruisers had been disabled and State Police Commissioner Olander only considered these instances to be just "a few of the most serious clashes."¹¹

After the shooting death of Trooper Sam Maples while attempting to arrest a hijacker, and upon reports of bootleggers using high-powered rifles, the State Police started to use their own heavy weapons.¹² At one point in 1934, the State Police had twelve Thompson Machine guns registered. Of the twelve, five were at the East Lansing headquarters, two between Manistee and Marquette in the north, another two at the various Detroit detachments, and four registered to the posts stationed along U.S. 112, in Jackson, Paw Paw, White Pigeon, and Jonesville. Although

they were registered in 1934, all but three were acquired between April 1930 and October 1931, the first three had been in the State Police's possession since around 1923. One was held at the headquarters in East Lansing while the other two were held at Jackson and Jonesville posts.¹³ It was also common for firearms taken from bootleggers and hijackers to be eventually used by the arresting post, regardless of whether it was local or State law enforcement officials.¹⁴

Along with the heavy hand-held weapons such as the Thompson Machine gun that were predominantly centered in the southern portion of the state, the State Police commissioned the construction of three heavy armored cars fitted with three machine guns each. Citing the rum runners, Commissioner Olander asked the Governor and State Appropriations Board to release funds to better equip the State Police, who were using six-cylinder cars and pistols against the eight-cylinder cars and machine guns of the bootleggers and hijackers.¹⁵ In addition to the three machine guns and heavy armor, each car was equipped with bulletproof windshields and the troopers were fitted with bulletproof vests.

There was not a large public outcry against such heavy-handed tactics, even though some must have been

concerned because of the pervasiveness of the new weapons. The emergence of armed bootleggers, hijackers, gunmen, and Chicago gangsters demanded a response in equal measures. The State Police had reacted harshly to conditions before, most notably in the northern mining strikes and in the Monroe-Toledo area but had done so without the use of heavy weapons, whereas the liquor traffic in the southern areas of the state gave an impetus to take advantage of the increase in weapons technology that came out of World War I.

These weapons could have been introduced without the growing violent criminal element associated with prohibition and rum running but their acceptance could not have been assured. The fear of violence against civilians was real even if actual encounters only consisted of traffic accidents and close calls. There was palpable fear among residents along the route. T.G. Yeomans, mayor for the city of St. Joseph in the southwestern corner of the state, wrote to Governor William Comstock thanking him for his reappointment of Commissioner Olander. Yeomans represented his constituents' attitudes when he told the Governor that "in no part of the state is organized crime more feared for we are in the Chicago area claimed by gangdom."¹⁶

The rise in violent crime associated with rum running along US 112 made it possible for the Michigan State Police to introduce heavy weapons in to their expanding arsenal but this would most likely have happened anyway. What the situation did allow, was for this to be done in a manner that was deemed acceptable by the public and lawmakers. Earlier, in the Monroe-Toledo areas, similar police tactical ingenuity and the proclivity to fire their side arms was met with negative reactions. After the growth in violent crime, particularly with the new gangster element involved with rum running, seeing a police force carrying their own machine guns and driving armored cars was much more acceptable to the populace. In effect, this opened an avenue for modern weapons to be used in other instances, which was quickly done. At the end of one of the articles showcasing the force's new armored cars, Olander reported that one of them was in the eastern "thumb" area of the state where he said there had "been an outbreak of petty crime."¹⁷

Notes for Chapter III

- ¹ From a small notebook kept Sgt. Jack Miller (MSP 1923-1959) while stationed in Negaunee during his first few weeks after graduating from the training school. He records his daily activities which consisted of buying alcohol undercover, cleaning barracks, and court duties. While eating dinner, he often left his whereabouts with the local telephone operator. Records 79-45, Box 23, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing.
- ² Undated office memo from P.H. Wheeler to Captain Roy C. Vandercook, Commanding Officer from 1917-1920 and Commissioner from 1921-1923. records 79-45, Box 23, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing.
- ³ "Michigan Will Have Great Radio Hook-Up for Criminal Apprehension," State Trooper (June, 1929), 9-10, 25.
- ⁴ "Bootlegger's Smoke Screen Trick utilized for His Own undoing," State Trooper (January, 1929), 8.
- ⁵ "New Radio System Proves Great Aid in Catching Criminals on the Job," State Trooper (May, 1929), 13-14.
- ⁶ Engelmann, 38.
- ⁷ Ibid., 39.
- ⁸ Ibid., 40-41.
- ⁹ "Alleged Uniform Rum-runner Is Caught, After Chase, by Troopers," State Trooper (August, 1930): 8; "Michigan Troopers War on Imposters," State Trooper (March, 1927), 29.
- ¹⁰ "Profession: Just Plain Bootlegging," State Trooper (June, 1928), 3.
- ¹¹ Detroit Free Press, 16 January 1930.
- ¹² "Leggers, Using Rifle, Escape," State Trooper (March, 1929), 26.
- ¹³ Firearm Registrations - Thompson Sub-Machine guns. RG 90-240, Box 14, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ¹⁴ Letter from Jackson Prosecutor, Henry D. Boardman to State Police Commissioner Oscar G. Olander dated February 16, 1931. The prosecutor is asking for the return of a Thompson Machine gun confiscated by the local sheriff and eventually handed over to the State Police. The Commissioner eventually complied, but not without "reserve[ing] the right to require the return of." Records 90-240, Box 14, Michigan State Police records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ¹⁵ Detroit Free Press, 21 January 1930.
- ¹⁶ Cop of original letter From T.G. Yeomans, mayor of St. Joseph to William A Comstock, Governor of Michigan, dated January 10, 1933. Records 79-45, Volume 61, Michigan State Police records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ¹⁷ Detroit Free Press, 16 January 1930.

IV

Public and Political Perceptions

Public

The public perception of the State Police was an integral part of the early years of the force. The state police movement itself was an outgrowth from public calls for greater professionalism and centralization during the progressive era. Particularly with the constabulary models and their association with anti-labor forces, public perception was an ongoing battle for much of the state police's early life. Multiple states were not able to form a state police because of opposition from labor interests. The Michigan State Police faced its own battles against Democratic lawmakers who repeatedly tried to disband the force. The State Police was able to survive because it became more neutral in labor disputes and pushed for higher levels of training and professionalism within the organization. Its actions along the US 112 trunkline also played a role, offering substantial visibility of its actions in newspapers and an opportunity to show the force's professionalism and honesty when it came to prohibition.

One of the earliest reasons for establishing a state police was the unhappiness felt by many with the local sheriff system.¹ Ill-equipped, untrained, understaffed, and beholden to voters every two years, it was a system where the sheriff did not patrol but only responded to crises as they arose, and organized posses when problems became too big for a solitary law enforcer. When they were able to have deputies, Sheriffs commonly appointed relatives. The fact that they were voted into office also became an issue because sheriffs became political actors with constituencies. Prohibition only added to the problem for the sheriff system by adding the opportunity to look the other way or accept bribes.

The Michigan State Police consistently demanded that their recruits avoid political discussion, be honest and professional at all times.² The force's actions during prohibition and in a specific case along the US 112 route gave an opportunity to showcase this to the state's population. Perhaps one of the more famous instances of police corruption was the case of Jackson Sheriff, Warren C. Stoddard, who ran a liquor ring out of the local jail. First approached by the Michigan State Police, the investigation eventually netted seventeen members of a highjacking and rum running ring run by the Sheriff.³ The

story was carried across the state in multiple newspapers was followed throughout the trial which resulted in Stoddard being fined \$10,000 and sentenced to two years in Leavenworth penitentiary. The State Police's involvement in the highly publicized case gave an opportunity to prove its own professionalism and legitimacy.

With numbers of employees only around 200 to cover the entire state, the State Police did not have that many opportunities to meet the populace face to face. Traffic encounters were some of the few exceptions where average law abiding citizens could see the troopers at work. The State Trooper consistently reprinted editorials that praised the activities of the State police in their interactions with the populace.⁴ The US 112 highway was a particularly busy trunkline offering multiple opportunities to be seen by motorists. In a reprinted editorial from the Albion Evening Recorder, the writer professes his pleasure on seeing troopers at two separate accidents, 100 miles apart, offering their services, even sweeping the broken glass off the road at one of them. Professing "that looks to us like service," the editorial goes on to call for more troopers to patrol the rest of the state's highways.⁵

Combating the rum running along US 112 afforded the State police the chance to not only to fight the

bootleggers but also to patrol one of the busiest highways in the state without taking valuable men away from other areas of the state. With few manpower resources, the ability to accomplish both tasks with small numbers of men was invaluable when every instance between a trooper and citizen was an additional chance to show the force's usefulness and efficacy. Commissioner Olander understood the importance of the public perception of the force, going so far as to praise the press for their role in crime prevention.⁶ He conducted radio talks espousing the activities of the State Police fighting crime and he spoke of their daily workloads. Olander also commissioned a school program where troopers went spoke to children about safety near roads and highways.⁷

Public perception of the Michigan State Police was an integral part of the force's ability to expand in the face of its detractors. The force's actions along US 112 were one of many different avenues where the State Police showcased its professionalism to gain the favor of the populace. It was aided by appearing to be above local politics, a liability which plagued local sheriffs. High profile cases involving corrupt law enforcement officials captured by the State Police only reiterated this position. As much as public perception of the State Police was

important, perhaps the perception held by the state's lawmakers was more so.

Political Perceptions

Backers of the State Police were typically Republicans. This insulated the police from disbandment by wet supporters and labor interests within the Democratic party because of the Republican party's strength in the state capitol. Still though, campaigns were mounted to disband the force or severely cut back its appropriations. This left the State Police having not only have to defend its legitimacy to the population of the state but also to the very political body that gave birth to it as recently as the previous decade.

After the end of World War I, there was a campaign to end the State Police and repeal Act 26 of 1919 establishing the State Police. Multiple sheriffs worked to have their county supervisors petition the legislature to disband the force. Wet supporters thought the force worked too hard in enforcing prohibition, labor leaders attacked it for its actions in labor disputes, and citizens decried it for placing unwarranted tax burdens. The campaign eventually failed after the State Police supporters charged that the true opposition was "wets," prompting numerous temperance,

anti-saloon leagues, and women's clubs to come out and voice their support for the State Police.⁸

During the mid-twenties, the Democratic Party, and perennial candidate for Governor, William C Comstock, started to campaign on the issue of disbanding the State Police.⁹ In 1927, the legislature took up the issue of the State Police in an attempted move to drastically cut back the force. Though the attempt ultimately failed, Comstock would bring the issue to the front of another campaign for Governor, this time in 1932. Promising to abolish the State Police if he became Governor, Comstock backtracked once he actually won office. In an attempt to show his displeasure with the political spoils system, he chose to re-appointment Commissioner Olander and was soon repaid for it when the State police captured three bank robbers whose story played to national exposure. This warranted a public congratulation to Olander from the Governor.¹⁰

Comstock's quick about-face on the issue of the State Police was a pragmatic political decision as opposed to a true belief in the organization. Though he would later see its usefulness, the force had narrowly escaped closing or at the least dramatic cutbacks. The perception held by some sections of the public regarding the force had changed throughout the twenties. Local sheriffs, who voraciously

opposed the creation of the State Police, began to tell its praises by the end of the decade.¹¹ Farmers, some of whom originally saw the force as a tax burden, also began to espouse the usefulness of the State Police. Individual encounters with the State Police between citizens and local law enforcement officers did much to improve relations. Outside of such individual meetings though, there was the role of the press. The State Police were closely followed in newspapers by the state's citizenry. Press reports paid close attention to the exploits along US 112. The State Police played up these reports to the press, responding to threats that the police "better lay off Chicago Booze runners" by continuing their policy of "hit and hit hard."¹²

While perception was important to the public, dollars and facts rang true with the legislature. One of the most important factors that Prohibition and US 112 played in the expansion and transformation of the State Police was to register surpluses in the department and state's accounting offices. During prohibition, the Department of Public Safety became a revenue source. Between 1924 and 1930, the department regularly collected over \$500,000 in fines, sales from confiscated goods, and in appraised value of confiscated property such as stills, boats, and cars.¹³ The financial viability of the new Department of Public Safety

was an issue important to many of the department's defenders. In 1920, the Michigan State Constabulary's budget was \$368,210 for the year. In 1921, the Constabulary was combined with the liquor law enforcement division of the Food and Drug Department and its \$150,000 budget. The offices of the State Fire Marshal and State Oil Inspector were also added. All four of the previous departments were redrawn under the new name of Department of Public Safety.¹⁴ The new department had an overall budget of \$350,000 for the fiscal years June 1921-July 1923. The department received the same amount for '23-'24 and \$9,000 less for the next two years. For 1925-'26 and '26-'27, the Department's budget went up to \$450,000 per year. The jump in 1926 and 1927 was attributed to Senate Bill 175 authorizing the establishment of a training school.¹⁵ An article in Commissioner Olander's scrapbooks, points out that the entire budget for the Department of Public Safety was \$341,000 while it cost taxpayers \$1,158,198.73 to maintain the state's sheriffs and county jails in 1923. At the same time, the department prosecuted more than twice the number of liquor violators than did the sheriffs combined.¹⁶

Arguments that the State Police was a drain on the taxpayers failed to hold water. The department was

regularly generating profits of \$150,000 per year for the state. In addition to adding to the state's coffers, the department was also able to add to its own resources without appropriation increases from the ever-fickle legislature. In 1923, the department was in possession of twenty-five cars and trucks and thirty-four motorcycles. Most posts had at least one of each with some of the troop headquarters carrying two or three cars while East Lansing had eight.¹⁷ The State Police only received official cruisers in 1929. Until then, the troopers had to make do with department motorcycles. Because of the difficulty that many experienced riding the motorized cycles for the first time, troopers almost always opted for a car when possible.¹⁸ Most often, troopers had to rely on confiscated "booze cars." Since it took about a month for these cars to be officially confiscated and taken to Lansing or the state fairgrounds, the troopers used them to "look for rum runners, bandits and stolen cars."¹⁹ In a 1929 memo, the department stated that it had fifty-three cars. Twenty-five were commissioned to the East Lansing headquarters, Free Lance squad, Secret Service, Identification bureau, and the Safety and Traffic division. Most posts had at least one car but some of the smaller northern ones were without. Of the fifty-three, twenty-four were confiscated

booze cars commandeered into service. Without a substantially larger budget, the Department of Public Safety was able to more than double the amount of cars in its service, of which a good number were booze cars.

Notes for Chapter IV

- ¹ Schertzing, "Against all Enemies and Opposers Whatever," 45-49.
- ² 1926 training manual containing 48 general rules and regulations. Records 79-45, Box 22, Michigan State Police records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ³ Jackson Citizen Patriot, 18 February 1927. "Liquor-Ring conspiracy Solved," State Trooper, (June, 1928), 11-12.
- ⁴ "State Police Demanded: Michigan Resort Regions Find Troopers Are Needed for Highway Patrol and Protection," State Trooper (November, 1926), 12-13. "Michigan Troopers Praised: Commendation of Helpfulness and Efficiency Comes from Many sources," (July, 1927), 21-23. "More Troopers Needed: Michigan Force Inadequate for State's Size and Growth of Duties it is Responsible For," (March, 1927), 11-12.
- ⁵ "More Troopers Needed," State Trooper (October, 1927), 16.
- ⁶ "Olander Declares Press is Potent Factor in Cutting Down Crime," State Trooper (March, 1928), 29.
- ⁷ Oscar G. Olander "Cruising with the Michigan State Police: Reprints of a Series of 18 talks Given from Station WKAR," Michigan documents, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ⁸ Schertzing, "Against all Enemies and Opposers Whatever," 186-87.
- ⁹ "State Police are made Campaign Issue By Democrats in Mich. Political Contest," State Trooper (November, 1926), 18; "State Election Turns on Troopers," State Trooper (December, 1926), 22.
- ¹⁰ Schertzing, "Against all Enemies and Opposers Whatever," 246-48.
- ¹¹ "County Welcomes Troopers," State Trooper (May, 1927), 5-6.
- ¹² "Gangsters' Threats are not Headed," State Trooper (June, 1926), 30.
- ¹³ Michigan Official Directory and Legislative Manual (Lansing: State of Michigan, 1925-1931)
- ¹⁴ Copy of Legislative Act 123, approved May 5, 1921. RG 70-45, Box 22, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ¹⁵ Copy of Senate Bill 175. RG 70-45, Box 22, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ¹⁶ Undated article in unnamed newspaper authored by Fred A. Grimes. Records 79-45, Scrapbook Volume 1, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing, MI. The article has been clipped out without retaining the publishing information but from the content's discussion of budget and arrests numbers lends to sometime in the spring of 1924 to be the most plausible.
- ¹⁷ Two files, one page each, titled respectively, "Cars & Trucks, Department of Public Safety" and "Motorcycles of Department of Public Safety," dated November 14, 1923. Records 90-240, Box 14, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ¹⁸ Michigan State Police: Inter-Office Correspondence, dated June 7, 1967. To: Enlisted, Civilian and Retired Members; From: Director Fredrick E. Davids. Titled "Early Days with the Michigan State Police." It is a manuscript compiled by Joseph S. Kostka, a civilian employ and later a trooper with the State Police in the "early days." Among the many topics, Mr. Kostka discusses the difficulties he and other troopers encountered with the use of motorcycles. Records 90-240, Box 15, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing, MI.
- ¹⁹ "Remembrances" by Ret. Lt. Kenneth White. Undated. Records 79-45, Box 22, Michigan State Police Records, State Archives, Lansing, MI. In Lt. White's colorful remembrances, he discusses his time

while posted at White Pigeon. From the troubles with booze cars; "sometimes we would be riding in luxury, then we might drop down to a Model A Ford," to the troopers' escapades working with Indiana sheriffs, without headquarters' knowledge, once the troopers had made the U.S. 112 corridor too "hot" for rum runners to travel.

V

Conclusion

In the sixteen years between the formation of the Michigan Constabulary, or Michigan State Police, and the end of national prohibition, the force underwent dramatic transformations in the face of pressure from labor supporters to disband or cutback. There were many reasons why the State Police was able to fight off disbandment, and move away from a horse mounted unit often used in labor disputes to a state wide investigation and policing agency. The explosion in the numbers of cars and miles of state highways insured that the force would have to incorporate a traffic patrol division within the department. Advances in technology and training made radios and fingerprinting available to be used in the apprehension of criminals and in investigations. Because of the state police roots in the reforms of the progressive area, scientific principles were heralded as the new weapon used to beat crime.¹ All of these factors helped contribute to the ability of the State Police to move away from the earlier paramilitary model to a conventional police force.

The role of prohibition and the rum running across highway US 112 also had a profound effect on the force's

ability to stave off detractors and transform its structure and image. Prohibition allowed for the introduction of new heavy weapons without much opposition. New tactics were devised and old ones improved upon in the context of violent crimes associated with a new criminal element, gangsters. The new criminals also helped the force retain its previously held notions of who criminals were, namely immigrants, while at the same time being seen as moving away from its nativist roots in favor of a more professional approach.

US 112 rum running and prohibition in general also helped the State Police to generate its own resources, allowing it to expand geographically without adding more troopers. The force was also able to make up its share, and more, of state appropriations by filling the treasury with fines and confiscated prohibition paraphernalia.

Perhaps the most important role of prohibition and rum running in the transformation of the state police was its image in the eyes of the populace and state lawmakers. Commissioned during a period of radicalism and with strong opposition forces, the State Police were able to effectively change people's minds about the usefulness and efficacy of the force. High profile cases involving gangsters, shootouts, and corrupt local cops were carried

across the newswires showcasing the ability and determination of the new force.

Prohibition and the rum running across the state were only a couple out of many different variables that affected the growth and transformation of the State Police during its first two decades of existence. But its position on top of the headlines gave the State Police a unique opportunity to showcase its better attributes of professionalism and courage while allowing an opportunity to continue its practice of targeting immigrants and radicals behind the scenes.

Notes for Chapter V

¹ "Michigan Force Becoming Leader in Scientific Legislation of Traffic," State Trooper (August, 1929), 15, 20-21.

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