

Chapter 11: Changing of the Guard

The initial term of the first town governing body ended in May 1951 with the election of what some would characterize as the town's first "bona fide" officials. In the election held on April 3, 1951, John Chiaf was elected as the town's Mayor. Owen Renegar and Lester Lloyd were elected as the town's next trustees.

Succeeding Cleo Myers as Town Clerk in May 1951 was Richard Thompson. According to Chiaf, Thompson was "a real nice fellow who was hardworking and honest as the day is long". Incidentally, Thompson was also owner of the movie theatre in the neighboring town of Britton.

Chiaf was a young ambitious man who at the time worked as a law clerk for District Judge Baker H. Malone. At night, he attended law school. Chiaf's mission as he saw it was to begin the professionalization of town government and to breakdown the ties between the town and the developers who up to this time had controlled the town government. According to Chiaf, the original town officials were "in bed" with the developers and he and his colleagues on the town council were united in their quest to eliminate the many conflicts of interest that they felt were detrimental to the welfare of the town.

Under Chiaf's leadership, ordinances regulating development were quickly passed to prevent shoddy work and cost cutting. A franchise was granted to OG&E to provide electric service to residents of the community, a move that was followed by the levy of a gross-receipts tax on the sale of electricity. Also enacted were the town's first ordinances dealing with public nuisances.

Chiaf recalls that there had been lax enforcement of laws in the community and that he felt it was imperative to get tough on speeding and other offenses in the community. To accomplish this, Chiaf hired Joe Tyler, an aggressive law enforcement officer with prior police experience. According to Chiaf, Tyler was "sort of obstinate, but he was what the town needed to get a handle on things". Chiaf's only misgiving about the appointment was that he wished that Tyler had been less aggressive at times with citizens.

In the early days, Tyler patrolled the town in his personal automobile that was equipped with none of the conventional law enforcement devices such as police radio, siren, radar, or emergency lights. Marshall Tyler handled this job by himself until 1954 when town trustees appointed an Assistant Town Marshall. Together, Tyler and his assistant kept the peace in the growing town until 1956 when the first Chief of Police was hired.

Although Nichols Hills and The Village have for the most part always maintained good relations, residents of The Village rose up in arms in 1952 in a dispute with Nichols Hills over law enforcement jurisdiction. Apparently, Nichols

Hills officers had on occasion made traffic stops within the corporate limits of The Village and, from time to time, had followed residents of The Village to their homes. Tom Bamburger, who later went on to become a state representative, was one of the unfortunate citizens to be ticketed by Nichols Hills at his own residence in The Village.

Mayor John Chiaf vowed to "stop this kidnapping of our citizens" even if it meant arresting Nichols Hills policemen. The Nichols Hills Chief of Police retorted "that can work two ways". A truce was finally declared and the streets were once again "safe" for motorists in The Village.

In 1956, the position of Chief of Police was established and Jack Reed was appointed to fill this new slot. Reed had been lured away from Nichols Hills police department where had served as a police officer. Reed began his career in law enforcement in Climax, Colorado where he had served a brief stint on the local police force.

The night that Reed took the reigns of the Police Department, out-going Town Marshal, Joe Tyler, begrudgingly insisted that the changing of the guard take place at midnight on New Year's Eve. It seems that Tyler, in his own intractable way, would hold on to power until the very last minute, --and not one second sooner.

According to Reed, he was more than willing to make the exchange the following morning, but Tyler would have none of that. At the stroke of Midnight, and as planned, the exchange of badges took place. The symbolic exchange ushered in the New Year as well as a new era for law enforcement in The Village.

It was under Reed's leadership that The Village Police Department began to take shape and to resemble a real police department and by 1957 Chief Reed was able to patrol his town on a twenty-four hours basis.