

Our Heritage

Sheriff's trace their heritage back to ninth century England when the King had a personal representative in each Shire whose title was the Shire Reeve. A shire was the equivalent of an American county, and the title Shire Reeve evolved into a single word Sheriff.

Shire Reeves executed royal writs, and were not only responsible for the police and jails, but also for collecting taxes. Their responsibilities as magistrates and chief law enforcement officers gave them broad duties and powers, but they did not act alone. Each English citizen was required to get involved in keeping the peace.

When English subjects came to the New World, they brought with them the traditions of the English criminal justice system, including the office of Sheriff. From 1608 to 1783 American Sheriffs were usually large landowners appointed by the colonial governors. With only slight modification they performed almost the same duties as their counterparts in England. The Chesapeake Sheriff of early Maryland settlements not only policed the counties, but also was the chief financial officer who collected taxes and fees and kept 10 percent of the proceeds.

In North Carolina the office of Sheriff has been traced back to 1739. It was said to have been created in response to public demand and quickly became one of the most important and influential positions in local government.

Colonel Ebenezer Sproat was appointed the first Sheriff in the Northwest Territory, Ohio Company. On September 2, 1788, Indians representing the more powerful tribes of the northwest assembled at Marietta to negotiate treaties. A great parade of all officials in the settlement marched to campus Martius Hall to open the first court. The Indians were deeply impressed with the pageant, especially with Colonel Ebenezer Sproat, High Sheriff. He carried a drawn sword, was over six feet tall, and so pleased the natives with his gallantry and size that they cried out "Heap big Hetuk." Hetuk was the Indian name for buckeye. The nickname never left Colonel/Sheriff Sproat and was gradually conferred upon all Ohio citizens.