



Altona Police Service 100 Years of Service. 1919 – 2019

Altona celebrated its 100th birthday in 1995 indicating that it became an official village in 1895, but it wasn't until 1919 that the village leaders began making public safety a priority.

The following is an attempt to provide the reader with some context of the Altona Police Department/Service, its members, and some historical facts. Records were not easy to come by but the author was able to obtain historical data through various history books and police records. If you find any errors or omissions as you read through this, please let us know.

One of the first laws to be enacted by the Board for the Village of Altona was a curfew. On the 5th of May 1919, the Board passed a bylaw that all persons under the age of 16 were to abide by a curfew. This, along with filling and lighting the lanterns, were some of the night watchman's duties. Henry J. Schellenberg was hired as Altona's first lamplighter and night watchman. Night Watchman Schellenberg ensured the streets were lit, safe and child free for \$10.00 a month.

In 1919 the Village Board also hired its first police constable who took over the duties of the night watchman.

Police Constable Isbrand Toews was named as the first Police Constable for the Village of Altona. His duties were many and included lamplighter, street and sidewalk repairman, public school janitor and truancy officer. He was also responsible to ensure that the children were off the streets at curfew time.

Because of Prohibition in the 1920s, Toews was also responsible to report any violations to the Sherriff in the nearby town of Gretna. Constable Toews' employment lasted only a short period of time (less than a year) and the position was then taken over by Constable



Klauss Enns. Enns handed over the duties in 1922 to Constable Cornelius Sawatzky, who served in the position up until Constable Bernard Busch took over in the '50s. It is believed that Constable Cornelius Sawatzky served the community for 32 years.

In the '50s Constable Bernard Busch received a promotion and was appointed as Chief Constable for the newly incorporated Town of Altona and held the position from 1958-1962.

Joseph Villeneuve was appointed Chief Constable from 1963 to 1977 at which point he resigned as Chief and became a Constable. Joe Villeneuve then served as a Constable until his retirement in 1981. In Constable Villeneuve's letter of resignation from the three officer department, he cited "Intolerable working conditions and shift schedule", as his reasons for resignation.



Chief Constable Bob Mart took over the Chief's position from Chief Joe Villeneuve and served as the Chief of Police until his retirement in 1989. Chief Mart came to Altona from the East Kildonan Police/Fire Department.

Once hired as the chief of police, Chief Mart immediately set to work on a report requesting that the department hire an additional officer. This request was granted and a fourth officer was hired.

In 1989 Eric Fuellbrandt, a former member of the RCMP, was hired as the Chief lasting less than one year in the position.

In 1990 Cst Gilles Turrene became the Acting Chief.

In 1991 Chief Glen Robinson came to the Altona Police Service from the Brandon Police Service where he had attained the rank of Sgt. Chief Robinson served as the communities' Police Chief until his retirement in 2010.

With the retirement of Chief Glen Robinson, the current Chief of Police Perry Batchelor took over the duties on March 1st, 2010. Batchelor joined the service when he left the Canadian Army in 1997 where he served almost 17 years. Batchelor was promoted to Sgt in 2000 then to Chief in 2010.

Historical Briefs:

Records show that during the dirty '30s the total Village Budget was in the range of \$1,500.00; half of what it was in the roaring '20s. As a result, the two employees, the Village Secretary and the Police Constable took a pay cut. Sawatzky's salary since being hired in 1922 had been \$20.00 a month but due to the depression, it was reduced to \$15.00 a month.

In 1935 The Power Commission came through Altona with hydro. This meant that electric street lights were installed thereby taking the lamplighter duty off of Constable Sawatzky. This had quite the impact as the town folk had grown very used to seeing him light the lanterns at dusk and extinguish them at sunrise.

During World War II, many folks from Altona joined the Armed Forces, some did not return home. John Sawatzky, son of Altona's Constable Sawatzky and his wife Elizabeth, was one of the war casualties. John Sawatzky died on the 24th of May 1944.



Records show that on the 8th of February 1954, during his first day on the job, Cst. Mike Stewart was faced with a break-in and a failed safe crack at the Altona Co-op Store where \$19.00 was stolen and a further \$25.00 scattered on the floor, but the thousands of dollars in the safe were untouched.

In the '60s, Council passed a bylaw around the registration of bicycles. The Altona Police Service of today has an online Bike Registry which has assisted police on many occasions to return a stolen or "borrowed" bike to the rightful owner.



In the '70s, the Town of Altona signed a policing agreement with the Village of Gretna to provide policing services to the village. The agreement only lasted a couple of years. Chief Constable Joe Villeneuve and Constable Phillip Bernard were the officers now providing services to the two centers.

In the 1980's up until the mid-2000s the Altona Police Service went from 4 to 8 police officers, the current complement remains 8 sworn police officers and 1 special constable. Through those years there were several rounds of hirings, mainly due to low pay and poor working conditions. That all changed in the late '90s after two very experienced officers



left the police service to join the RCMP. Other municipal police agencies in the Pembina Valley were experiencing the same results. It was during the 1998 contract negotiations that the police officers received the great news of a substantial pay increase and the promise of new officers to offset the amount of very often unpaid overtime. Quality of life increased dramatically and the constant cycle of training officers, only to have them go off to better paying policing jobs, eased substantially.

In 2008 the Town of Altona entered into a policing agreement with the Town of Plum Coulee. This agreement remains in place to this day.

Over the past 100 years of policing the Village, then the Town of Altona, there has been many, many changes, too many to mention; but I will reference a few:

Things like the training the officers of today receive, and the equipment they now carry; the fact that police vehicles are now supplied, as opposed to using the officer's private motor vehicle to conduct patrols; full dispatch over encrypted radio systems; and instruments used to detect the use of alcohol, or now that cannabis is legal the consumption of it, and the list continues.

As we reflect on the past 100 years and the police services humble beginnings, we thank the officers who came before us. Forty-two sworn officers, three Special Constables and 9 Auxiliary Officers have worn or are wearing the Altona Police shoulder flash. Today's members of the Altona Police Service shall continue to do their job in the interest of public safety; to the best of their abilities for the next 100 years and beyond.



Chief of Police Perry Batchelor 2010-Present

References, Altona Archives, Conversations with Altona Seniors, Current Altona Police Officers, Altona the Story of a Prairie Town, Town of Altona Millennium Diary, Altona a Pictorial History and Police Employment Records.

