

Records of the Charleston Police Department, 1855–1991

The Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library

Compiled by Nicholas M. Butler, Ph.D., Manager, and Kathleen Gray, 2008

Collation: 1.5 linear feet

Description: This collection contains the only surviving historic records of the Charleston Police Department from 1855 to 1991. The records consist of Annual Reports (1910–1989), Arrest Records and Morning Reports (1855–1894), Clippings and Ephemera (1910–1981), Cash book, Receipts, and Disbursement Book of the Commissioners of the Police Relief and Pension Fund (1903–1923), Contracts, Bonds, and Buildings Specifications relating to construction of the new Police Department (1887–1907), Financial Records, General (1871–1923), Historic Files (1856–1991), Miscellaneous (1864–1959), *Official History Police Department of Charleston, S.C.* (1925), Payroll Book (with Vouchers) (1889–1924), Payroll Vouchers (1905), *Rules and Regulations Governing the Police of Charleston* (1856–1890).

The majority of manuscript materials housed within the collection are available on microfilm reel POL 1, entitled “Historic Files.” Also included on this reel are various ephemeral materials and newspaper clippings on a variety of police topics, such as chiefs of police, departmental history, and police stations. The payroll books contain a chronological listing of employees who were paid for police duty. These payroll records exist on microfilm only; the originals do not survive. The original records of the Morning Reports and Arrest Books are held by the Charleston Library Society. The Historic Files, which encompass one reel of microfilm, contain files on topics pertinent to the Police Department, such as chiefs of police, police stations, rules and regulations, and annual reports.

Note: Historic records such as case files or cell registers have not survived.

Historical Note: In the early colonial period, police protection for the citizens of Charleston was performed by the Town Watch, a paramilitary unit. After incorporation in 1783, Charleston formally established the City Guard, another paramilitary force. From 1846–1855, the City Guard was reorganized several times and finally emerged in 1856 as a uniformed police force under the administration of Mayor Porcher Miles.

Prior to the close of the Civil War, martial law was enacted in Charleston, and the city police force disbanded. Civil police forces were revived and reorganized, however, in 1865 following the election of P. C. Gaillard. These forces served as a counterpoint to the federal authorities until the end of martial law in 1877. The election of Mayor W. W. Sale that same year marked the introduction of a solid city police organizational system of officers and men, divided between the main station and the upper station, a system that was continued by succeeding administrations.

On 7 February 1888 a new station was opened at the corner of southeast King and Hutson Streets. In 1895 the State of South Carolina authorities established a metropolitan police and seized control of the organization from January 1896 to 30 September 1897, at which time control was returned to the city. In 1907 a large, modern facility was erected at the northwest corner of Vanderhorst and St. Philip Streets. The police department remained at this location until 1974, at which time they moved to their current location on Lockwood Boulevard.

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Collection Outline

BOX 1

Annual Reports, 1910–1914
Annual Reports, 1953–1959
Annual Reports, 1960–1964
Annual Reports, 1965–1989 (incomplete)
Clippings and Ephemera, 1910–1981
Commissioners of the Police Relief and Pension Fund, Cash Book, 1903–1923
Commissioners of the Police Relief and Pension Fund, Receipts &
Disbursements Book, 1903–1923, loose pages

BOX 2

Contracts, Bonds, and Building Specifications, new Police Departments, 1887–1907
Financial Records, General, 1871–1923
Miscellaneous, 1864–1959
Official History Police Department of Charleston, S.C. (1925) (two copies)
Payroll Vouchers, 1905
Rules and Regulations, 1856; [1868] (fragment)
Rules and Regulations Governing the Police of Charleston, 1882, 1890

MICROFILM (14 ROLLS)

Arrest Records and Morning Reports 1855–1894 (incomplete)
Payroll Book and Payroll Vouchers, 1889–1924 (incomplete)
POL 1: Police Department “Historic Files”, 1856–1991
POL 2: Arrest Records & Morning Reports, Lower Wards, 1855–56, 1861–63, 1868–69
POL 3: Arrest Records & Morning Reports, Lower Wards, 1855–56, 1861–63 (Refilmed)
POL 4: Arrest Records & Morning Reports, Lower Wards; Morning Reports, Main Station,
1869–70, 1883–84
POL 5: Arrest Records and Morning Reports, Central Police Station, 1887–1888, 1888–1889
POL 6 Morning Reports, Central Police Station, 1894
POL 7: Vouchers, 15 Jan. 1889–Oct. 5, 1892; Ledgers, 15 Jan. 1889–30 Sep. 1892
POL 8: Vouchers, 18 Oct. 1892–31 Oct. 1897; Ledger, 15 Oct. 1892–31 Oct. 1897
POL 9: Vouchers, 15 Nov. 1897–2 July 1902; Ledger, 15 Nov. 1897–30 June 1902
POL 10: Vouchers, 16 July 1902–2 Aug. 1907; Ledger, 15 July 1902–31 July 1907
POL 11: Vouchers, 13 Aug. 1907–16 Feb. 1912; Ledger, 15 Aug. 1907–15 Feb. 1912
POL 12: Vouchers, 2 Mar. 1912–16 Sep. 1916; Ledger, 29 Feb. 1912–15 Sep. 1916
POL 13: Vouchers, 2 Oct. 1916–22 Mar. 1921; Ledger, 30 Sep. 1916–15 Mar. 1921
POL 14: Vouchers, 2 Apr. 1921–16 Apr. 1924; Ledger, 31 Mar. 1921–15 Apr. 1924