

Growing Up in Wenham in WWII Recollections of a Bygone Era

By Bob Hicks

Chief Eddie Hall Law & Order in 1943

While the police were listed as being in the forefront in administering the war-time civilian defense activities described in an earlier essay, the everyday world carried on and it included a certain amount of police activity. In 1943 (our Tercentenary year) M. Edward Hall was Chief of Police once again, having received the highest annual total of votes for Constable, thus becoming High Constable and Chief. He had been Chief since he got the most votes in 1936 and stayed on the job until 1959 when the new full time police department was formed and he retired. The three Constables were elected town officials, the rest of the Reserves (3) and Auxiliaries (12) were appointed by the Selectmen. The first police station was on the second floor of the old firehouse, later moved to what is now the COA building on Ellis Ave.

For all intents and purposes, however, Chief Hall pretty much ran his department out of his barbershop on Railroad Avenue in South Hamilton. His steady stream of Wenham customers provided him with an unending flow of news about what was going on in town, invaluable in his ongoing efforts to minimize "vandalism", generally attributed to certain youthful residents.

Most of us growing up in town soon came to realize that it was a good policy to stay in Eddie Hall's favor by getting our haircuts there. I was a bit late in going to Hall's Barber Shop, as living way out in West Wenham, it was almost four miles away and until I was

ten I had no bicycle so I got my haircuts when my father got his in nearby Danvers. When I first showed up at Hall's I was grilled on my life and times to date in town. Stuck in the barber chair while he wielded scissors and trimmer, as a teenage youth I was pretty hard pressed to avoid answering his questioning. The fact that my chores on my father's small farm kept me out of greater downtown Wenham even after I had wheels apparently satisfied the Chief that I was unlikely to be a troublemaker.

A brief look at Chief Hall's 1943 Annual Report might be of interest to better appreciate the scope of his duties protecting persons and property during the WWII era:

Official duties carried out included: five arrests and concomitant court appearances, three licenses suspended, five out-of-town court summonses served, four accidents investigated, and twenty-eight motor vehicles transferred.

The budget for the year was chiefly spent on salaries: Chief Hall \$170, Constable Joseph Carnes \$87, Constable Donald Killam \$46. Salaries for Reserve Officers and Auxiliary Officers who served on two special details came to \$58 for the Tercentenary Celebration and \$5 for Halloween. Halloween? Yep, it was all trick and no treat

then. Apparently the Chief's informants suggested some tricks might be in the works so some police presence was deemed necessary.

With the salaries out of the way, the balance of the costs for maintaining law and order in town included mileage \$43 (all police business was conducted using the officers' private vehicles), phone \$34, office \$23, equipment \$12, and an emergency calling Dr. Larchez to an accident \$3. In all a bit under \$500.

In retrospect over the intervening years I came to realize that Eddie Hall's greatest service to the town was keeping juvenile delinquency under control. In so small a town there weren't many recreational opportunities for idle youths. Only fear of being caught by Chief Hall kept many would-be delinquents from acting. On the few occasions when some thought they had gotten away with it, Chief Hall's grilling of haircut clients and tips from his string of informants soon had him on top of the case, and soon the time came to redress the grievance.

One example will illustrate how Eddie Hall dealt with these issues. A small group of wannabe delinquents from downtown came out to West Wenham to roam the woods of the Tucker Estate (now William Fairfield Drive). Out there in the woods amongst the out-buildings stood an unused barn with some of the Tucker's no longer needed old horse and buggy days equipment stored within, gathering dust over the years. The barn windows had glass sashes that proved too irresistible to remain in place and rock throwing commenced until all the glass lay shattered in the ground. Soon enough Chief Hall had extracted the names of the perpetrators from his sources and took action.

He called the perpetrators and their parents together with the Tucker's caretaker and it was agreed that the windows would all be re-glazed, paid for by the parents. Whatever these parents did about their offspring making good was up to them. The subject was closed, there was no police record nor any news item in the "Salem News". The errant youths involved would think twice before trying anything like that again!

(This writer comments on the 1940 photo: Chief Hall seems to have chosen these official uniforms based on World War I officer uniforms, khaki brown with brown Sam Brown belts.



At Attention, c 1940. Standing together from left to right are Frank A. Corning, M. Edward Hall and Donald J. Killam. Around this time, whoever got the most votes was "high constable" and served as police chief.