

Dateline: July 28, 1949

Source: The Ridgewood Herald-News

## **"WE WERE REALLY FLATFEET THEN" SAYS GLEN ROCK'S FORMER CHIEF RECALLING EARLY POLICE DAYS**

When James E. Houlihan, retired Chief of Police of Glen Rock, was one of five men on the Ridgewood Police force in the late 1900's, a red light on a high pole at the corner of Maple Avenue and Prospect Street was the signal of trouble.

This was the link between the arm of the law, patrolling his beat at night, and police headquarters. "Central", receiving a call for police aid from a frenzied telephone customer, would press the button that turned on the light. The policeman, able to sight the signal during his rounds, would rush to the nearest telephone and get the message from "Central".

Prior to the advent of the telephone, Mr. Houlihan recalls, various ingenious methods were used to get personal messages across. For instance, one of the first village doctors of sixty years ago, had a slate hanging on his front door. If he were out his caller would pencil a note telling him to go to a certain patient. Perhaps the doctor was on a call at a great distance but when he reached home – a day or so later – he drove to see if the patient were still living.

Mr. Houlihan remembers the excitement caused by the first automobile in the village. This was owned by Dr. William L. Vroom who, by the way, had to pass a steam boiler engineer's examination in New York before obtaining his license. This was in 1900.

The former Police Chief rode his bicycle in the early days of automobiles. The wheel was swift enough to catch up with the gasoline buggies. This happened more than once when he had to make an arrest.

Police headquarters at one time was a small wooden building on Broad Street. There were two cells for prisoners, but the danger was that the captives might have flown by morning if left there overnight.

One of Mr. Houlihan's most exciting episodes was his arrest of three desperate characters whom he caught prowling in a Ridgewood house – at night. This was the last time that he walked his beat without his gun.

"Come on out of there – hands up," he shouted. They did and in the dark, his fingers outstretched stiffly like a gun point against the back of one of the men, he marched all three to headquarters. When they were searched, two of the burglars carried 38 calibre [sic] guns under their coats.

Mr. Houlihan is the owner of many medals. One, awarded by Policemen's Benevolent Association, is a gold honor medal given to him for bravery in gun fight, in 1916. He had been shot three times.

He speaks frankly of the all-brawn days of police work which has evolved into the scientific profession of today.

Life in Ridgewood of a half century ago was idyllic as seen through Mr. Houlihan's eyes. If you went anywhere to the north or south on foot, you followed the railroad track, he says.

Since he was a baseball enthusiast he frequently played sand lot baseball at Suffern, walking the entire distance – along the railroad track. James Houlihan also went to Westwood and Hackensack to play ball for which he was paid the munificent of \$1 as pitcher.

School days in early Ridgewood meant sitting in a one-room school house on Union Street or in one at Ackerman Avenue and Rock Road in a section then called "Small Lots".

Roller skating became a fad with the appearance of the first strip of blue stone sidewalk, fifty feet long, in front of Dr. Parker's house, he recalls.

As a boy, Mr. Houlihan worked for Jake Ward, Carriage and Sign painter on Chestnut Street. Later he drove an ice wagon for Crouter, the butcher who harnessed his horses to a meat-grinding machine in order to make the sausage meat that he sold.

The future policeman enlisted, with three other Ridgewood boys in the U. S. Cavalry and was discharged in 1904, at Ft. Riley, Kansas. He is a Spanish-American War veteran.

In 1907, a year before his marriage, he enlisted as a policeman and served for 12 years. He went to Glen Rock from Ridgewood as Chief of Police and served in that capacity for 26 years.

It was probably his love of horses that prompted the Chief to join the Cavalry and when he came back into civilian life he promptly started a livery stable for, better than anything else, he loved to work around horses and to train them.

Fast driving in those days was the sport for the gay young blades and Houlihan, with other young men of Ridgewood, used to take part in races over the country roads with wheeled carriages and sleighs, and he won many a fast race. He has plenty of stories of those "good old days" when a spanking team of horses drew cheers from the bystanders as it larruped down the village streets.

He knew Ridgewood when it included Glen Rock. Like other old-timers, he can explain to the newcomer why the line of demarcation between the Village and its younger neighbor to the South is as crooked as a ram's horn. Landowners had voted "for" or "against" secession when the question was put to them. Since next door neighbors not always had the same opinion the line of separation meandered at will.

It was about 1907 that Houlihan entered the Ridgewood police department and from there, came to Glen Rock in 1918. The police were real "flat feet" in those days for patrolling by car was unknown. A few years after he took over the Glen Rock job the town bought a motorcycle and then, about 1926, the first police car was purchased.

Mr. Houlihan was the entire police force when he came to Glen Rock, when the late Isaac Kemp was mayor. He succeeded Sam Jensen, the uniformed policeman the borough ever had [sic], and held the fort by himself until 1922 when Captain Sam Park was added to the force. Thereafter, as the borough grew, new men were appointed to serve under the Chief.

It was in 1944 that Chief Houlihan retired from active duty. Speaking of him editorially this newspaper said of him then: "It is with keen regret and a feeling that something solid, dependable and genuine will be lacking in Glen Rock's Borough family, that people in the town have learned that Police Chief James Houlihan is retiring...."

"He has watched the town grow from a country village in which he was not only police chief but the whole police department, to its present position of a dignified, well-planned and well-run suburban community..."

Today the Chief and his wife, the former Edith Warner of Paterson, still live in Glen Rock. They have been married 41 years and have four daughters.