



HISTORY OF THE WINNEBAGO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

It wasn't until 1842 that the Territorial Legislature provided for the organization of county government. An act was approved organizing the counties of Winnebago and Calumet, but said counties were to be attached to Brown County for judicial purposes. In 1847 an act was passed, fully organizing Winnebago County for its own judicial purposes.

Winnebago County's first sheriff was a WHIG candidate from New York, named N.P. Tuttle. A farmer by occupation, N.P. along with his wife, Laura, was the first settler in the town of Vinland in 1846. The first birth in the town was N.P.'s son, Oliver. Tuttle was elected to the office of sheriff on September 6, 1847 at the age of 28. The county population at the time was 2,748.

The first Winnebago County Jail was authorized in 1849 and built the following year by Kendrick Kimball. It was completed February 5, 1850. The jail was built of oak timber; the rooms were 8 feet square, 8 feet or less high and had several 18 inch square holes for windows. Entire cost \$500.

In 1859 a courthouse was built. The jail and sheriff's office was provided in the basement. The jail contained 9 cells. In 1870 the inmate count was 66 and average imprisonment was 25 days. In 1875 a new jail addition was added.

The sheriff was paid to "board, wash and mend" for all prisoners. In 1894 the sheriff would be provided with a residence, which was a fringe benefit. It also assured the sheriff would be available around the clock. The sheriff's residence was completed in 1900. It was two stories high. There was an office for the sheriff on the first floor. The second floor had four bedrooms and a bath. The jail portion was 36 x 62 feet and had 20 cells, 3 for females, 3 for juveniles and an "insane ward" with a padded cell.



In 1920 the county motorcycle patrol was started. Arno Reinke of Winneconne was the first officer appointed by the Road and Bridge Committee of the County Board. In 1933 the department had increased to 4 officers. Each officer was required to furnish their own squad car or motorcycle. In 1936 squad cars and motorcycles were equipped with one-way radios under the call letters WAKE, one of the first radio systems in Wisconsin. WAKE was on the air 24 hours and was maintained by both the county and city. In December of 1949 WAKE became KSA 675.

On July 27, 1938 the sheriff lost his living quarters when the completion of a new courthouse took place with the jail being located on the 5th floor. The sheriff's general office is located on the ground floor of the building with direct telephone contact between the two. The sheriff's department garage is located at the rear of the courthouse which is located at 415 Jackson Street in Oshkosh.

In 1948 motorcycles were discontinued and a switch was made entirely to automobiles. During 1953 the department consists of 12 officers, 1 desk sergeant and 4 radio operators. Officers work a minimum of 48 hours per week and shifts are changed weekly. Each officer has 1 day off per week, but works Sundays and holidays when at full staff.

December 14, 1978 the K-9 team is formed. "Smokey" and "Jet" are the first German Sheppard dogs on duty. Officers are trained by the Cascade County Sheriff's Office in Montana. In June of 1979 SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) is organized and becomes part of the department.

In 1980 county and city governments join together to build a Public Safety Building located at 420 Jackson Street across from the courthouse. It contains a communications center and 250 rooms for judges, attorneys, county and city law enforcement and a jail with a capacity of 122.

On April 6, 1983 the department institutes the 911 Emergency Telephone System. On July 16, 1995 the Winnebago County Work Release Center/Huber Facility opens. This is a 148 bed facility with 3 prisoner wings or "pods", each holding 48 beds. The center is located off of County Road Y in Oshkosh.

In 1997 the County Board is asked to approve a north side site for a new sheriff's office and jail. On February 25, 1998 the board gives the ok to build. On March 28, 1999 construction is scheduled and on December 20, 2000 a 200,000 square foot law enforcement center is approved and construction begins.

In July of 2001 ground breaks for the new facility and in 2003 the Sheriff's Office, located at 4311 Jackson Street, is open and functioning. This is the present Sheriff's Office to date and is under the supervision of Sheriff John Matz..

Historical information compiled by Deputy Kyle J. Holewinski and obtained from the Oshkosh Public Library, Wisconsin Historical Society, Oshkosh Public Museum and the Kansas Historical Society and Library System.