

Cranston Police Uniforms, Badges, and Patches

Uniforms as symbols of authority are nothing new. During the days of the Roman Empire, Centurions wore helmets with a red plume of feathers identifying them as law enforcement officers.

In this country, police officers in large cities such as New York began wearing uniforms as early as the 1850's, but this was the exception rather than the norm. Many smaller departments didn't start wearing uniforms until later in the century.

It's unknown exactly when Cranston's police officers first donned their uniforms, but it's estimated that it was sometime during the late 1870's or early 1880's.



Two badges worn about the time of the Civil War.

Contrary to popular legend, early police badges were not made of copper, but nickel and tin. Many tended to be generic in nature with only a title stamped into the metal. Early peddlers, (today's equivalent of traveling salesmen), would journey across the countryside in their covered wagons carrying a box of these badges hoping to sell a few to the local lawmen of the towns they visited. Besides "Constable", and "Police", other titles included "Justice of the Peace", Sheriff, Deputy Sheriff, and Magistrate. For an extra fee, some peddlers would stamp the name of the city or town into the badge.



A generic police badge with "Cranston, R.I." added.
Worn circa 1870's



John Kenyon, Badge number 1
1870's

John Kenyon was first appointed a constable in 1871 and elected Town Sergeant in 1873. The Town Sergeant wore badge number one since he was in charge of all police constables in Cranston. Mr. Kenyon apparently didn't wear a formal uniform, but evidently dressed appropriately judging by his photo. He served as Town Sergeant until 1880, and continued to serve as a constable for another year afterwards.



Chief John Bigbee
Circa 1890

(Photo courtesy of Patience Hamilton – John Bigbee’s grand-daughter.)



Cranston Police Officers 1898

Left to right are; John Yeaw, Charles hazard, Patrick Trainor, Chief John Bigbee,
James G. Miller, ??? , and Benjamin Allen

Most early police uniforms in America were modeled after the “Bobbie” uniforms of England. One difference was, and still is, that police officers in this country wear breast badges.

The first manufactured badges for the Cranston police appeared in the 1880’s. They were round, with a number punched out in the middle. They read “CRANSTON” across the top and “POLICE” across the bottom. It is known that the punched out numbers in the center numbered at least into the 30’s, but possibly much higher. No rank badges were produced as the department did not have a rank structure at that time. The Chief of Police/Town Sergeant wore badge number one.



An artist rendering of a round style badge worn by Cranston police officers from the 1880’s to about 1895.



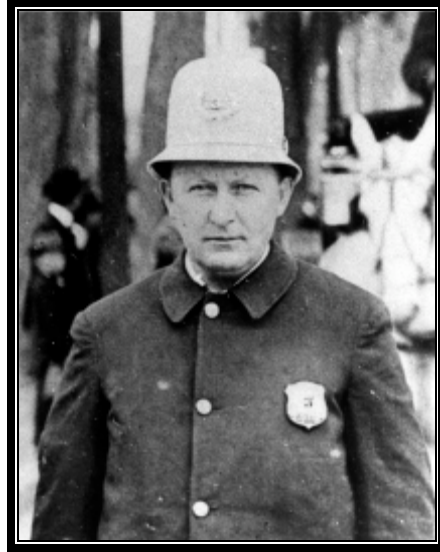
A patrolman’s badge.
Worn circa 1895 to about 1915



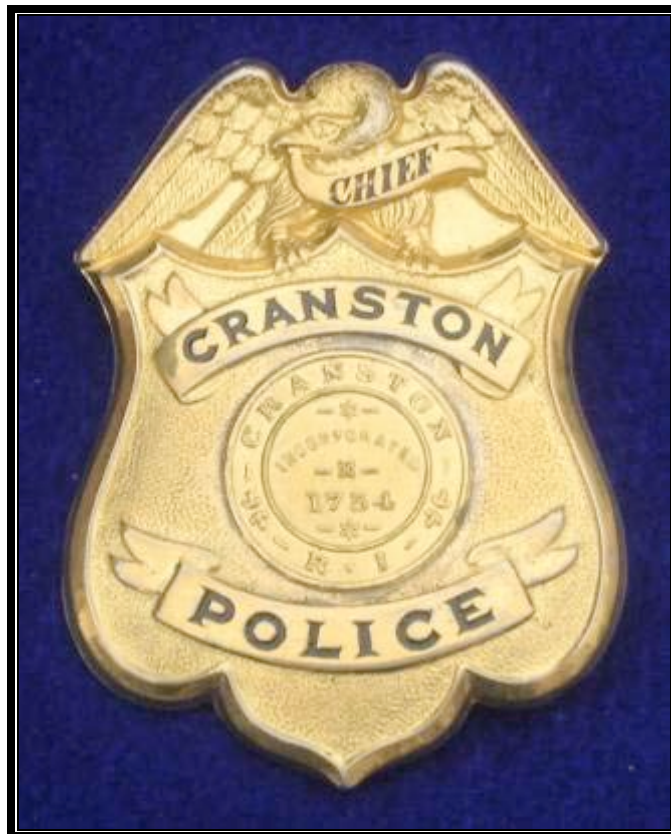
An officer's badge with no number cut out.
Worn circa 1890's.



A badge with the number engraved.
Worn circa early 1900's.



Constable Patrick Trainor
1898



Chief's badge believed worn by Patrick Trainor in 1909.
(Note town seal in center.)



Patrolman Charles Smith in summer uniform, circa 1910.
Hats were pale green for summer and black for winter.
(Photo courtesy of Mrs. Baxter, Cranston Historical Society)

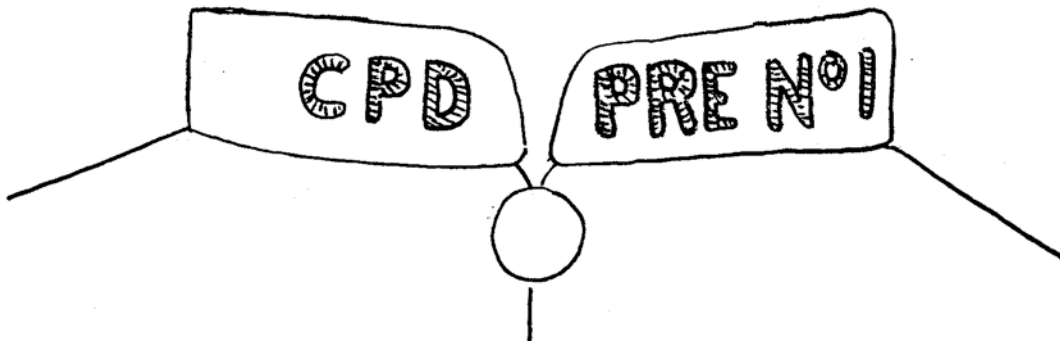


Patrolman Charles Smith in winter uniform circa 1910.
(Note "pillbox" style hat.)

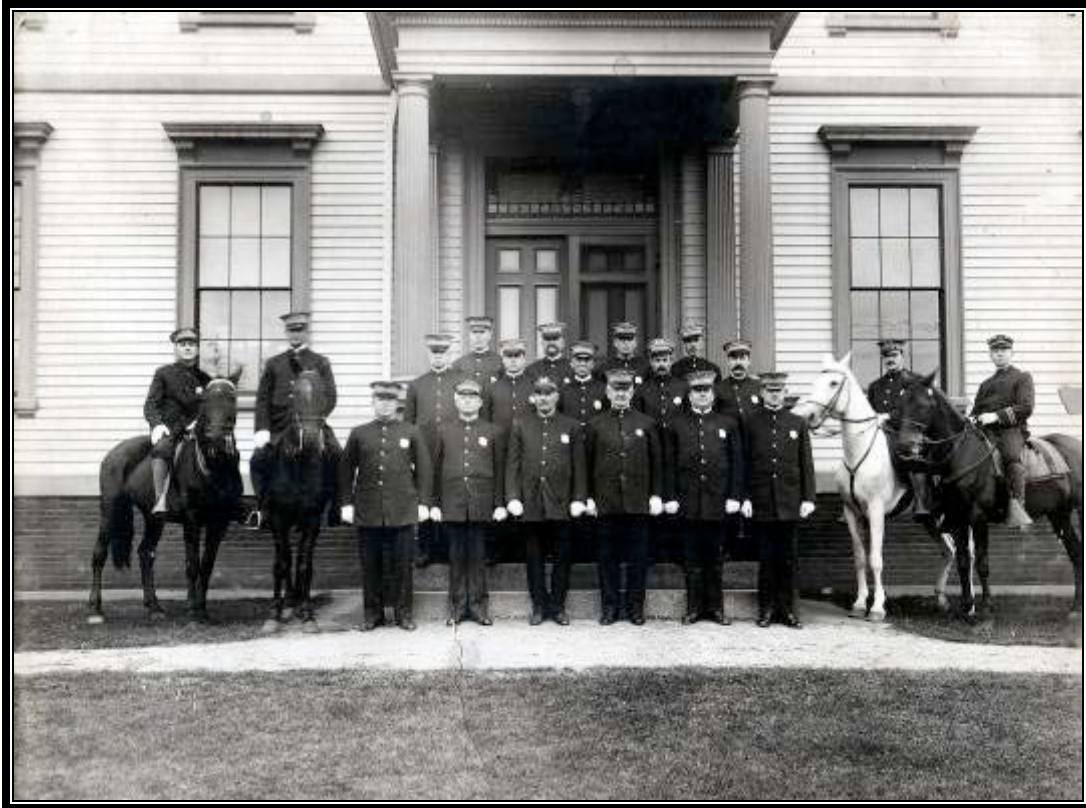


Policemen's Ball at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet, 1915.
(Note that collar style has changed.)

Left to Right, standing –Ptl. Mahar, ??, Insp. Jim Miller, Ptl. Charles Smith,
Ptl. Claus Abrahamson, ??, ??, Ptl. Clay DeBow.
Left to Right, sitting – Ptl. John McGee, Chief Daniel Kiernan, ??



Uniform collars had bullion thread embroidered in them from about 1912 to 1915/16 indicating which precinct the officer worked in. At the time, there were the Edgewood, Arlington, Auburn, and Knightsville precincts.



Cranston Police Department about 1915
(Note change in hats.)



Hat wreath worn circa 1890 to about 1920.



Cranston Police Relief Association, 1916.

By 1916, Cranston officers were wearing a new badge style that featured the city seal. The uniform collars still indicated which precinct an officer worked, however the bullion thread had been replaced by metal pins.



A Patrolman's badge dating to 1916.

Patrolmen badges issued from 1916 to the 1960's had a large city seal like the one pictured above. Later badges had smaller seals. The department wore this style badge into the 1990's.



Special Patrolman's badge
Circa 1918 to World War II

Even after the first permanent police department was established in 1910, the department continued to employ “special constables”, later called, “special patrolmen”, to fill in when manpower was needed. These officers wore the same uniform as a permanent patrolman with the exception of the badge. Special patrolman badges featured a number instead of the city seal.

Department rosters of the 1920's show that special patrolmen numbered in the hundreds. One badge that belonged to Fred Joy Sr. had the number of 550.

In 1921, the rank structure of the department consisted of the chief, a lieutenant, an inspector, and 14 patrolmen. By 1929 the department consisted of a chief, a captain, four sergeants, and 31 officers.

The rank of lieutenant first appeared in 1921, and in 1925 the rank of captain was created to replace the rank of lieutenant. The department worked under a two platoon system during this time with only a day shift and a night shift of 12 hours each. The chief supervised the day shift with two sergeants, and the captain took over at night with the aid of two other sergeants.

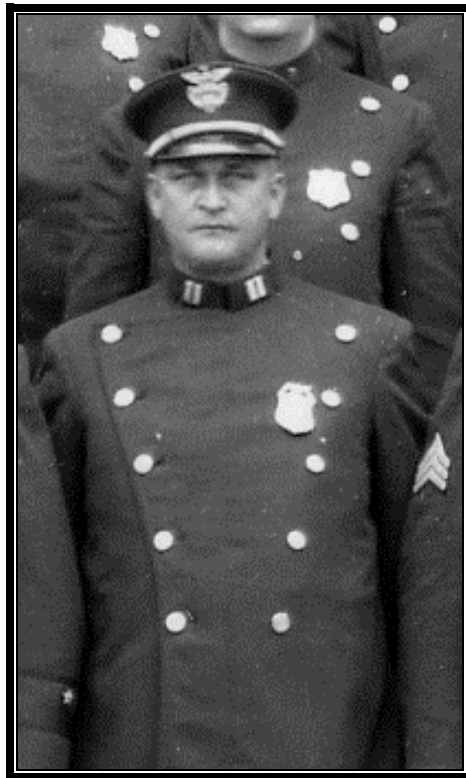
The first supervisor badges of the 1920's were actually modified patrolmen's badges with a rank panel added to the top.



Sergeant badge worn circa 1925 to early 1940's.



An early Captain's badge.
This style was issued from 1925 to early 1990's.



Capt. Clay Debow, 1929

It is said that Captain Debow loved working nights so much that he turned down the chance to become chief after the death of Chief James Miller in 1941.



Hat badge worn circa 1920 to 1975

About 1920, the department adopted a more modern uniform hat badge. The new hat badges were numbered like the old hat wreaths. In the 1960's, when the department rank and file gained seniority rights, the number on the hat badge reflected an officer's seniority. The lower the number, the more time an officer had on the job, and therefore, the greater that officer's seniority.

The drawback to this system was that whenever an officer retired, everyone behind him in seniority had to swap hat badges. As the department continued to grow, this became cumbersome, and in 1975 the department adopted new hat badges that did not have numbers.



Officer Pat McHugh, Badge number 7.
Circa 1925
(Note the numeral 2 on each collar.)



A chief's hat badge worn between 1920's and 1940's.



Police Department in front of Cranston (East) High School, 1929

About 1930, the department adopted a new uniform hat based on what the New York City Police Department was wearing at the time. The traditional “eight-point” hat is still worn by Cranston officers today.



An unidentified officer circa 1930 wearing an “eight point” hat.



Brass uniform button worn from 1920's to 1970's.



Rookie police officers February 1936

Left to Right – William Hines, Joe Austin, Arthur Soderberg, William Nixon, Louis Morenzi, Terrance J. McKaig, George A. Seavor, Roland G. Cornell.

(Photo courtesy of Terrance McKaig.)

These eight officers were hired in the summer of 1935, however, for the first six months they didn't have any uniforms to wear. At the time, Cranston's uniforms were made in New York City and officers had to wait until a representative could be sent to take their measurements and then go back to New York to make the uniforms. The representative generally made two trips to Cranston each year. The new uniforms finally arrived in February, 1936, and this photo was taken of the officers wearing them the day they arrived.

During the six months the officers waited for their uniforms, they were forced to work indoors at the police station. This picture was given to the author by Terrance McKaig in November 1996. Mr. McKaig left the department in 1946 to join the FBI. He later left the FBI and spent 20 years as chief of police in Glastonbury, Connecticut.



Officer Charles J. Rogers
First day on the job in his summer uniform.
July 16, 1937
(Photos courtesy of the Rogers Family.)



Sergeant Charles J. Rogers, 1940's
(Note the hat badge.)



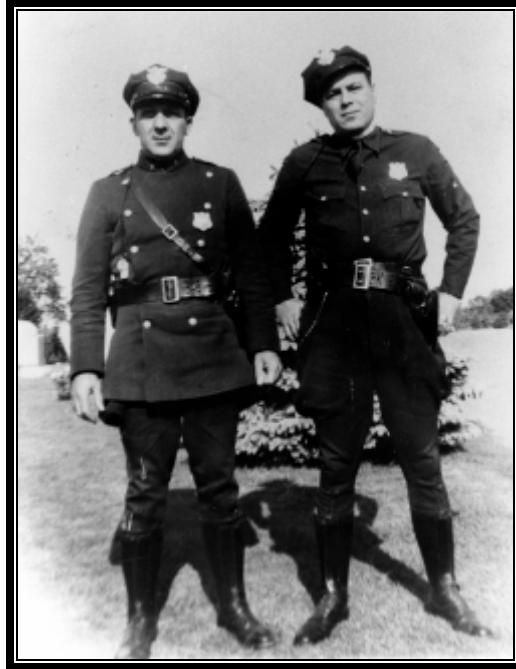
Lieutenant Nelson G. Bourret, circa 1940.
Lt. Bourret was promoted to Chief in 1941.

(Note the uniform of the day was a long sleeve, dark blue shirt with no tie.)
(Also note the lieutenant's breast badge.)

(Photo courtesy of the Bourret Family.)

In 1943 the city appointed 200 auxiliary police officers to supplement the regular police force. These officers wore badges similar in design to the ones worn by sworn officers. All were numbered from 1 to 200.





Paul Soscia and Michael Morro, circa 1942

Ptl. Soscia is wearing the spring and fall uniform
and Ptl. Morro is wearing the summer uniform.
(Note the cross draw holsters.)

(Photo courtesy of Lieutenant Paul Soscia.)



Sergeant hat badge issued about 1950 to 1975.

Around 1950, the department began issuing a new style of hat badge for supervisors that featured applied raised lettering. They were worn by all ranking officers until 1975.



Night Shift, January 1955

Left to Right, First Row: Sgt. Joseph L. O'Rourke Jr., Capt. Patrick J. McCarron, Lt. Rowland G. Cornell. Second Row: Carl Fascia, Charles A. Carney, Edward J. Callery, Russell M. Trant, John Quinn, Clifford Shultz, Francis Schinse. Third Row: William L. Costello, John T. Enos, Anthony Moretti, Walter L. McGarry, Daniel Kenneally, Francis E. Carey, George W. Skuce, Donald Della Porta.



Lieutenant's badge, 1950's.

In 1954, officers worked 16 hours every other day and earned \$58.00 per week. A new re-organization of the department brought the number of sworn officers up to 83. The department's phone number was UNION 1- 5700.

In 1957 the position of Commander was established and the rank is designated by a single star worn on the shoulder. (The chief of police wore 3 stars.) The position was created to act as the department's second in command.

In 1962, the rank of Deputy Chief was established and this rank was designated by two stars, thus outranking the commander.

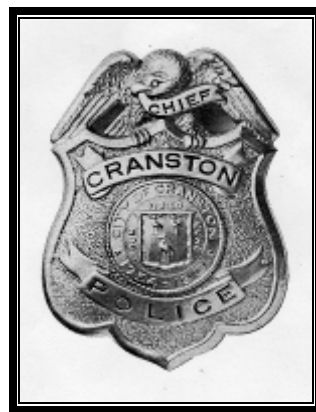
The rank of Commander was abolished in 1965, and the Deputy Chief position was abolished in 1966.

Each rank was only held by one man, and the positions were abolished upon their retirements.

In 1950, the Detective Division consisted of six men, two of whom worked nights. Early badges were gold colored and carried the title "DETECTIVE". In the 1960's, the title was changed to "INVESTIGATOR" and the badges were silver colored.



Early detective badge, 1950's



Chief's badge worn by Louis Fouchecourt, 1950's.



Lieutenant's hat badge circa 1960
Issued from c. 1950 to 1975.



Patrolman Ernest Potter, circa 1960
(Note long sleeve, light colored shirt.)



Officer Ray Flynn, 1962



Custom metal shoulder insignia for leather jackets, 1960's.

Officers in the 1960's who wore the heavy three-quarter-length leather coats had custom die-cast shoulder insignia that featured raised lettering and the city seal. Silver colored ones were worn by patrolmen and gold colored ones were worn by ranking officers. Unfortunately, the insignia was made of lightweight pot-metal that tended to crack and break, thus, few examples survive today.



Officers in bomber style jackets, 1966.

(Left to Right – Ptl. Christopher D’Ambrosio, Ptl. D. Salisbury, Sgt. George Carello.)

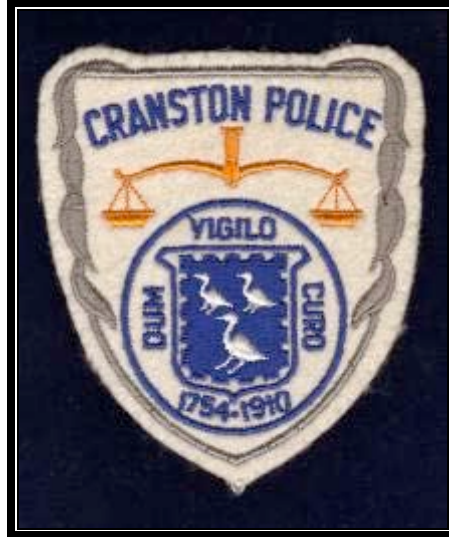
General order 66-1, dated January 10, 1966, authorized the wearing of service bars on the left sleeve of dress uniforms and duty jackets. One bar was to represent 3 years of service.

General order 66-18, dated January 30, 1966, stated that sergeant stripes will be attached to every uniform of the day. Formally, sergeants had only worn their stripes on their dress coats and duty jackets.

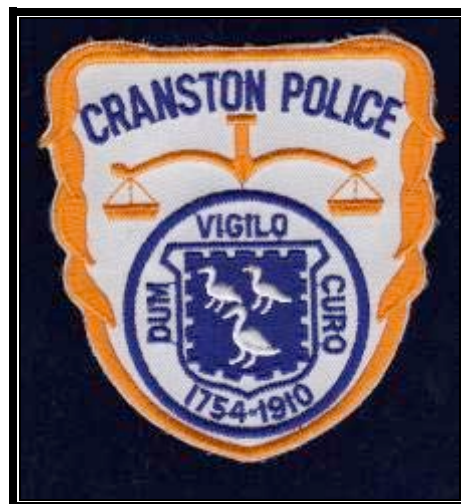
In 1967, the first departmental shoulder patch was designed and worn on the left shoulder of all uniforms. The patch came in two styles; a silver border for patrolmen and a gold border for supervisors. Both styles featured the scales of justice and the city seal. The earliest ones were produced on a heavy felt material. Later ones had a twill background.

The new patches were popular with the officers as well as the public. They not only dressed up the uniform, but also boosted morale.

The department wore this patch style until 1994.



A first issue patrolman's uniform shoulder patch produced on heavy felt.
1967

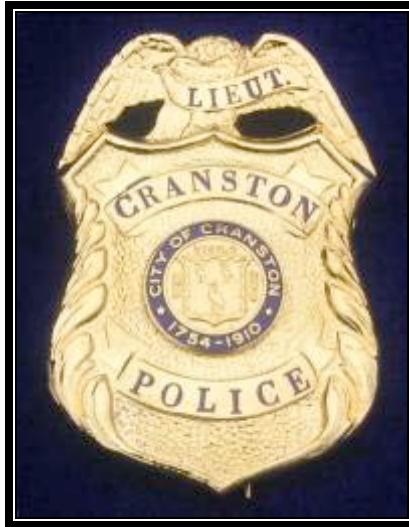


A later issue supervisor's patch produced on twill cloth

The City Seal Explained

The city was named for Governor Cranston who served Rhode Island in the earliest days of the colony. The birds are cranes, from the Cranston Family coat of arms. "Dum, Vigilo, Curo," is Latin for "While I watch, I care." 1754 is the year Cranston was incorporated as a town, and 1910 is the year Cranston was incorporated as a city.

The city seal was adopted in 1910, and has been on badges worn by the Cranston police since 1915.



Lieutenant's badge, 1970's
This style was issued circa 1960 to 1995



Detective badge with the title of 'INVESTIGATOR'

In the 1970's, the title of "Detective" was changed to "Investigator". Officers in specialized units were also issued this style of badge with different titles such as, "B.C.I.", and "Prosecution" in place of "Investigator".



A second, larger style of Investigator's badge.

Detective Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Captain, badges were of this style but gold in color. They would read, (rank), "Investigator", "Cranston Police", and "RI".



Uniform Lieutenant's badge, 1970's



Patrol Officer's hat badge, 1975

In 1975, the department did away with the numbered hat badges worn since the 1920's and adopted the style pictured above. It was also about this time that officers began wearing their badge numbers on pins above the right uniform pocket. Supervisor hat badges were also changed to this style.

The department also began to issue breast badges with a smaller city seal, but otherwise, they were the same style that had been worn since 1915.



Brest badge 1970's



Sergeant hat badge 1970's. Style I

Supervisor hat badges came in two styles, either by accident or by design. Style I had the rank panel on top and the name "Cranston" on the bottom. Style II had the word "police" across the bottom.

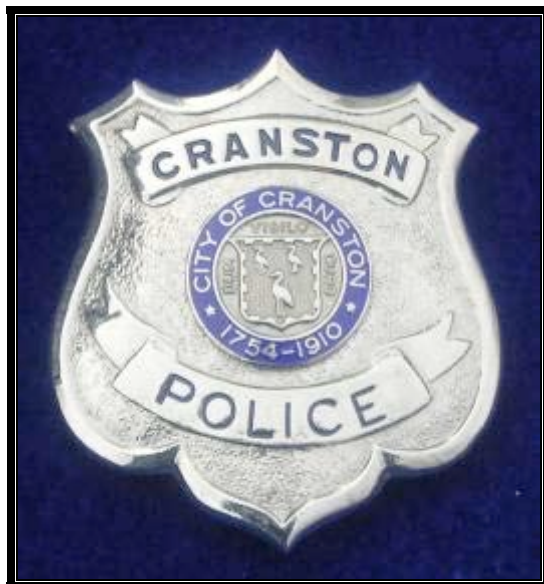


Sergeant hat badge, Style II

This particular example was issued circa 1990.
(Note the change in the city seal.)



Sergeant William Louix, 1978
wearing new style jacket.



Patrol Officer's badge 1983

Officer's badges of the early 1980's had blue enameling around the city seal which improved the look of the badge. Before then, the blue enamel had only been featured on rank badges.

By the late 1980's, patrol officer badges were issued with "R.I." at the bottom. These badges continued to be issued until 1995.



Patrol Officer's badge 1989



Captain badge circa 1985

This style was issued from the 1960's to 1995 as a shirt badge for all supervisor ranks.



Coat badge issued to supervisors 1989 to 1995



Chief of Police badge
1990

In 1990 a new badge style was designed for the department that is still worn today. The new style is considered a big improvement over the old one, featuring two-tone, silver and gold coloring, with blue enamel panels.

In the early 1990's, only those who held the rank of captain and above were issued the new badges, but those of lower ranks were allowed to purchase their own, if they desired, at a cost of \$50 apiece.

In 1993 the department decided to give the uniforms a new look. For many years, officers had been wearing light blue, short sleeve, shirts in the summer, and long sleeve, navy blue shirts in the winter. It was decided to change the shirts to "LAPD Blue" for both summer and winter for officers and keep the white worn year round by supervisors.

A new uniform shoulder patch was also adopted which gave the uniforms a more modern look.

Another change was the addition of service bars to the long sleeve uniforms shirts by all ranks. Previously they had only been worn on coats and jackets.

By January of 1994 everyone was wearing the new uniforms. Shortly afterward, the new badge style was issued to every sworn member of the department.

Changing the uniform patch was more difficult than one would imagine. After several sketches were submitted, a style was chosen, and a prototype was produced. The prototype featured a unique shape for Rhode Island which was felt would set Cranston apart from other departments in the state. However, the prototype was not well received (officers polled wanted to keep the old style.)

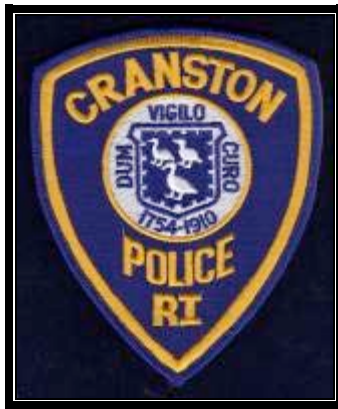
The first run of the new patches arrived in late 1993 with a modified city seal. They were quickly issued to the officers, but it was decided to order the next run with the city seal featured on the old style patch.



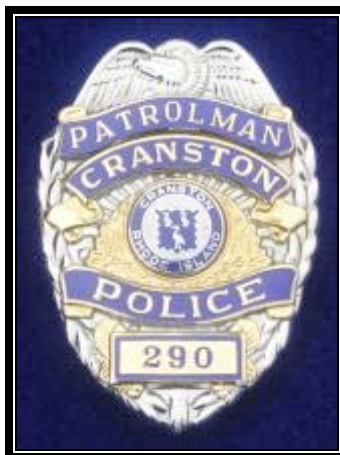
Prototype uniform patch produced in 1993
Only six were made as this style was never adopted.



One of the “first run” patches produced for the department in 1993.
All following orders had the traditional city seal.



Current issue uniform patch
1993 to present



Patrolman badge circa 1994

The early issue badges had the title of “Patrolman” and “Patrolwoman”, but those issued in 1995 and later carry the generic title of “Officer”. Badges issued before 1995 with the old titles were still authorized to be worn and were phased out through attrition.

Other titles found on the new badges include “Inspector”, for those working in the Prosecution Unit, “B.C.I.” for those working in the Forensics Unit, and “Detective”. (The title of “Investigator” was discontinued at this time.)

The new badges were issued with an officer’s number on them so they could be traced if lost or stolen.

An interesting fact about the new badges is that one can tell when a badge was made simply by looking on the back. The manufacturer puts a three or four digit numbers on the back of each badge indicating the month and year it was produced. For example, 995 means that the badge was made in September of 1995. In some cases, repair dates, and the first name of those who worked on the badge are also included.

Some badges do not have a number, but the letters “R.I.” at the bottom. Sometimes badges need repair, and these badges were purchased by the department to be worn by an officer while their badge was being fixed.



Sergeant badge 1995



A Patrolwoman hat badge
Issued early 1990's



A generic “Officer” hat badge
Issued from about 1995 to about 2000



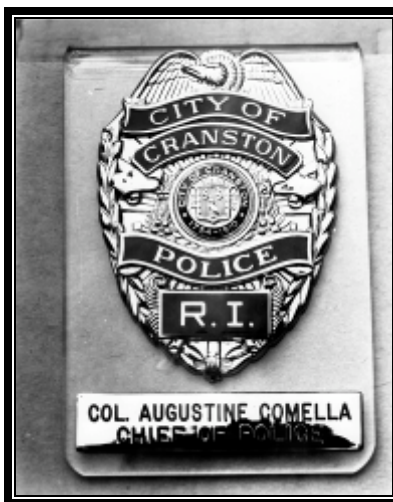
Colonel’s hat badge circa 1990
Colonel Mancuso changed the official title of Chief of Police to Colonel.



Current issue sergeant hat badge.
By the late 1990’s, all ranks were issued these
two-tone style hat badges to match the breast badges.



Officer Mike Falls, August 1991,
wearing light blue summer uniform shirt.
The light blue shirts were discontinued in 1993.



A badge worn by Colonel Comella circa 1993.



New Snowsuits, February 1994

Left to Right – John Ryan, Joe McMahon, Peter Podedworny, Craig Perinunzi

In 1994, officers were authorized to purchase snowsuits at their own expense to be worn on regular patrol duty or special details. Eighty officers bought the suits which cost \$95.00 apiece.



A metal “shoulder plate” worn on leather jackets.
Worn from 1979 to present.

By the mid 1960's, Cranston officers were no longer wearing leather uniform coats. Instead, a blue "bomber" style jacket was issued for winter wear. However, the popularity of the leather coats among the rank and file remained strong, and there were those who lobbied for their return.

On September 26, 1979, Chief Anthony Moretti issued Memorandum 79-9, authorizing officers to purchase leather coats at their own expense. The new coats would require some sort of identification insignia, but the old style metal shoulder insignia worn on earlier leather coats was no longer being manufactured so the department opted for an oval shaped metal plate pictured above.

The plates were worn on each shoulder. There were nickel plated ones for patrol officers and brass plated ones for supervisors. These plates proved much more durable than the old ones.

Most officers bought leather jackets after their first year on the job but some did not.

In 1995, the department discontinued the authorization to wear leather uniform coats, and issued every department member a Gortex winter coat to promote uniformity. Once again, the popularity of the leather coats didn't go away, and persistent lobbying convinced the chief to authorize their return.