

The Emergency Police

Since the earliest days of the department there were civilian officers who assisted the regular police in one way or another. In the beginning they were called constables. During World War II they were known as the Auxiliary Police. In the 1950's they became the Emergency Police and in the 1990's, they were referred to as crime watch officers.

Although not full-time paid police officers, they existed as extra eyes, ears, and hands for the regular force, in many cases taking the same risks without the benefit of pay.

Company A, of the Cranston Constabulary

In 1917, during the First World War, Company A, of the Cranston Constabulary was formed in Edgewood. They were established as a "home guard" unit in the event of an invasion or civil disorder. The company held regular drills every Friday night at the casino building at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet where they practiced military discipline and training.

According to a newspaper article from May 1917, the unit consisted of 60 men, but there was reportedly room for 30 more. Each member was required to be in good physical condition, attend regular drills and meetings, and furnish themselves with firearms and become proficient in their use. Anyone between the ages of 18 and 45 could apply.

It's unclear what became of Company A after the war, but it is presumed that the city maintained the organization for as long as it deemed necessary.

The Auxiliary Police

During World War II, all American coastal communities were forced to adhere to mandatory blackouts at night to prevent allied shipping from being silhouetted against the shoreline making them easy targets for enemy submarines. It was also thought that the blackouts would make it harder for enemy aircraft to locate easy targets.

Due to decreased lighting, more traffic accidents and crimes occurred, and the darkness led others to worry about sabotage to water supplies and other facilities. Virtually every city and town had air raid wardens and plane spotters, but the increased burden placed on the police department called for more manpower for the duration of the war which wardens could not supply.

Due to these problems, both real and perceived, the Cranston Auxiliary Police were established in 1943 with a complement of 200 officers. Their duties included patrol work, guarding potential targets of sabotage, traffic direction, as well as other civil defense duties.

It is unclear if the Auxiliary Police were armed or not, but it's possible they were due to the duties they were asked to perform.



Auxiliary Police badge
1943



Civil Defense patch
Said to be worn by the Auxiliary Police

The Emergency Police

After World War II, the Auxiliary Police continued to exist as a civil defense agency, however their role as guards and traffic officers was discontinued, and membership dwindled.

The 1950's were a time when the "Cold War" between the United States and Russia heightened anxieties of the threat of nuclear war. Many people built bomb shelters in their backyards. Municipal buildings everywhere put up yellow and black signs indicating a "fallout shelter" in the basement. Public schools conducted "air raid drills" where children were taught to "duck and cover" in the event bombs started to fall. Civil defense groups sprang up all around the country.

In 1951, the Auxiliary Police became known as the Cranston Emergency Police.

The Emergency Police did not carry guns and did not have arrest powers, however, they could be granted full police powers if a situation arose where both the Chief of Police and the Mayor felt it was necessary. The only time in their history when they were given such authority was during Hurricane Carol in 1954, when the Emergency Police assisted in rescue and evacuation operations and stood guard to protect business property.

In the beginning, the Emergency Police wore green Army style dress uniforms with white shirts, which were probably a hold-over from the Auxiliary Police days. They continued to wear these uniforms until the 1960's when they adopted one similar to what regular Cranston officers were wearing; blue police hat, a gray shirt, black tie, and dark blue pants.

Since their inception, the Emergency Police wore badges similar to those of the Cranston police. They also had their own rank structure within the organization up to the rank of captain.

One interesting fact is that the Emergency Police designed their own uniform shoulder patch years before the regular force. Their first regular issue patch was round with a gray background and green lettering for the blouse coat, and one with a white background was worn on the shirts.

The Emergency Police carried out limited patrol duties. On assigned nights, members would patrol all city properties in a marked cruiser checking for vandalism and unsecured doors or windows. Their job was to "see and report". If they found anything wrong, they would radio for a regular officer to respond.

In addition to their patrol duties, the Emergency Police would assist with crowd control and traffic direction during special functions like the St. Mary's Feast held every year in Knightsville. The Emergency Police didn't get paid for any of the work they performed.

During their years of operation, the Emergency Police had one officer who died while acting in his official capacity. On April 7, 1972, Officer Morris Kantrowitz suffered a fatal heart attack while working a special detail during a function being held at the Narragansett Brewery.



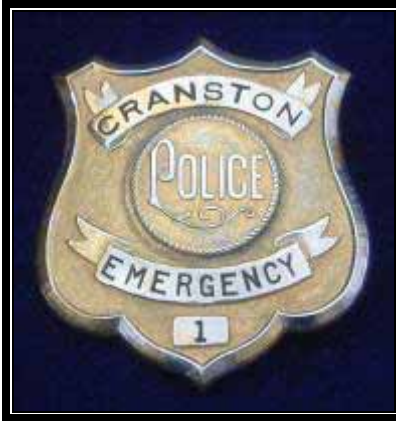
Not much is known about this shoulder patch. Was it a prototype, or worn on an early uniform? It is made of felt with a cheese cloth backing and most likely dates to about 1950. It belonged to Fred Joy Sr. who also served with the Auxiliary Police.



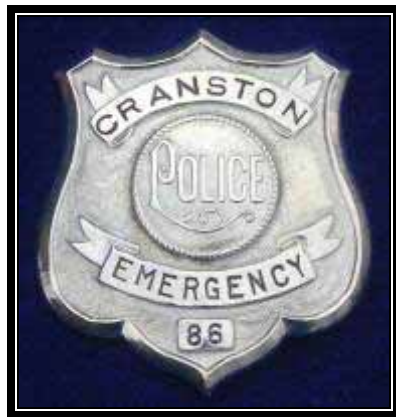
Uniform shoulder patches worn circa 1951 to circa 1967.



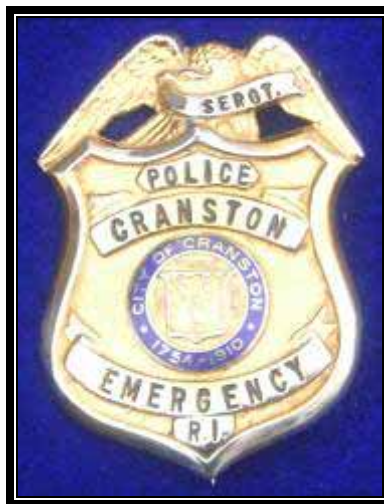
Cranston Emergency Police, circa 1955



Badge #1
Belonged to Fred Joy Sr.



Badge style worn from circa 1951 to 1993



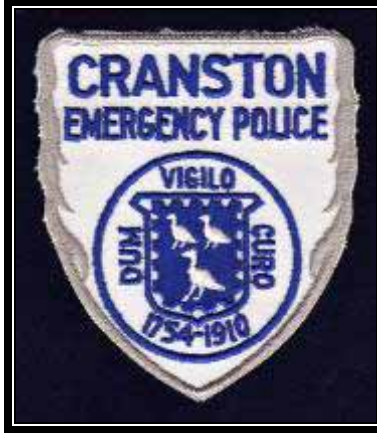
An example of a rank badge worn by the Emergency Police
Worn circa 1951 to about 1989



Many members attached these license plates to their personal cars.
This one dates to the 1950's. Later ones were white with red lettering.



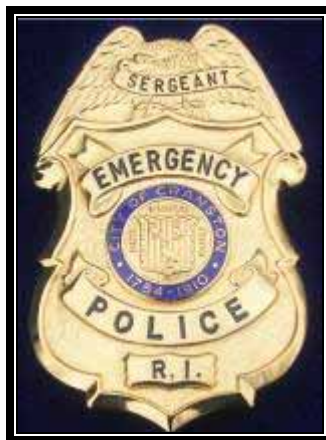
Cranston Emergency Police Officers
September 1970



Uniform patch
worn circa 1967 to 1993



Captain badge worn late 1980's to 1993



Sergeant badge worn late 1980's to 1993

The Cranston Neighborhood Crime Watch

In October of 1993, the Emergency Police were disbanded and reorganized into the Cranston Neighborhood Crime Watch. Crime Watch officers performed most of the same duties that the Emergency Police did with the exception of traffic direction and crowd control. Like the Emergency Police, they did not carry weapons or have powers of arrest.

The Crime watch adopted new uniforms, with re-designed badges and patches with the wording “police” removed, so the public would not mistake them for regular police officers.

The new organization was given three hand-me-down cruisers that were repainted and marked specifically for the neighborhood crime watch.

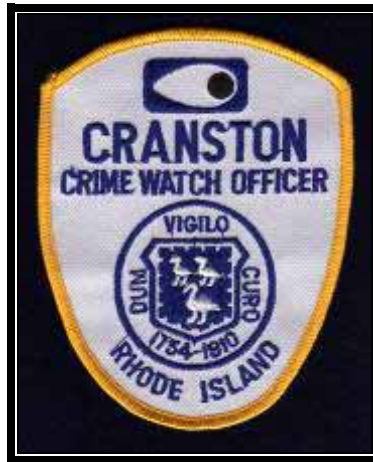
The new officers received special training to help them with assignments. The organization consisted of about 40 members, all of whom worked on a voluntary basis. As time went on, membership dwindled, and the Neighborhood Crime Watch was disbanded in 1997.



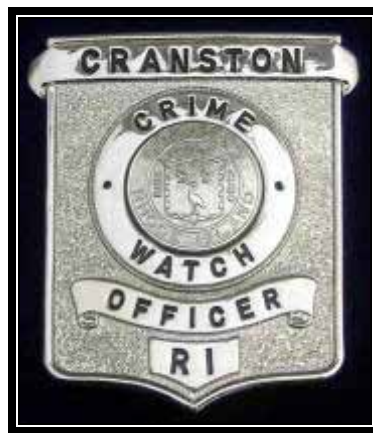
Neighborhood Crime Watch officers 1993



A 1988 Ford with Neighborhood Crime Watch markings.



Uniform patch worn 1993 to 1997



A badge worn by the crime watch officers 1993 to 1997.

