

History of Civilianization

As far back as 1845, in the earliest days of the NYPD, there were civilian employees in the Department. Today, 165 years later, civilians are an integral part of the “job.” Civilians, who were primarily utilized in clerical and custodial positions in the early years, are today serving with dedication and commitment in over 180 various job titles. Civilian members of the department have played an important, and at times an unheralded, role throughout the history of the greatest police department in the world.

The history of civilian employment in the New York City Police Department goes as far back as the 18th century and actually pre-dates the establishment of the Department as a single entity in 1845. At the tender age of 36 years, Theodore Roosevelt, the most notable civilian employee, was sworn in by Mayor William Strong to head the three-member Board of Police Commissioners in May 1895. Roosevelt had no prior law enforcement experience. He was appointed to a term of six years and earned an annual salary of five thousand dollars. His portrait is prominently displayed in the Office of the Police Commissioner. To this day, the Police Commissioner carries out the ministrations of the Police Department at the very desk used by Theodore Roosevelt over a century ago.

Historically, males predominantly made up the ranks of civilian employees. The men even filled stenographer positions; a task which was traditionally relegated to females. Nevertheless, Commissioner Roosevelt’s first personnel action in 1895 was to replace two male officers assigned as assistants by his predecessor with a woman. This bold move meant a savings for the City of \$1,200 per year. Minnie Gertrude Kelly became Secretary to the Board of Police Commissioners and was referred to as “the girl secretary.” A century later, the majority of the civilian workforce in the NYPD is women.

In 1906, Police Commissioner Theo A. Bingham introduced the concept of civilianization as we have come to know it today. Commissioner Bingham’s proposal called for the identification of police officers assigned to clerical positions that could be returned to patrol duties by replacement with a non-uniformed civilian. In 1907, Commissioner Bingham requested that the uniformed headcount quota be increased by 2,000; he was granted just 607. To address the manpower shortage, Commissioner Bingham recommended that civilian employee’s backfill the officers previously performing clerical duties. He requested that, “...the department be granted more clerks, stenographers and typewriter copyists to replace the members of the force now detailed at headquarters for clerical duty.”

The first effort toward large-scale civilianization came from the Office of the Mayor. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia initiated civilianization into both policy and practice over an extended period of time. His 1936 budget message reflects his sincere commitment to civilianization in the NYPD. He pledged to “...continue with the policy of freeing for actual police duty members of the uniformed force who have been detailed to other work. For many years, men who should have been at their posts in the ranks have been engaged in work which should have been done by clerks, telephone operators, chauffeurs, etc. Such members of the force are being returned to regular police duty as rapidly as

civilians on appropriate civil service lists can be brought into the department and trained.”

Records of early civilian police personnel do not appear to exist. The first available headcount numbers date back to 1911 when there were 10,207 uniformed members and 247 civilian members of the department (97.6% vs 2.4%). A significant increase in the civilian ranks occurred under the administration of Mayor LaGuardia. When he took office in 1934 there were 18,268 uniformed officers and 329 civilians (98.2% vs 1.8%). By 1940 the uniformed strength stood at 18,177 with civilians numbering 1,083 (94.4% vs 5.6%). Today there are 34,956 uniformed members of the service and 14,731 full-time civilian employees. Part-time school crossing guards number 1,637. Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s Fiscal Year 2011 budget calls for a further reduction of the uniformed headcount of 400 and the hiring of additional civilians to replace them.

Conditions in the 1940’s were ideal for the pursuit of civilianization. Even so, there was little change in the numbers of civilians employed as resources were channeled toward maintaining the uniformed ranks which were seriously depleted with the demands presented by World War II. Civilianization once again emerged in the 1950’s with the introduction of the school crossing guard program. In 1954, 73 part-time school crossing guard were hired. Further civilian hiring was suspended by Mayor Robert Wagner due to budget constraints, but by 1959 there were 1,248 school crossing guards. The SCG title remains an important resource of the NYPD. On November 17, 1994, Eileen Duggan, a school crossing guard in the 114th Precinct, became the first civilian employee of record to lose her life in the performance of duty. While at her post on 60th Street and 31st Avenue, she was fatally struck by an automobile as she assisted an elderly woman to cross the street.

In the early 1960’s, the Police Department under Commissioner Michael J. Murphy undertook an analysis of specific positions to determine their suitability for civilianization. Position audits were done on 2,500 non-patrol assignments in administrative units. The majority of these positions were classified as “clerk” or “typist.” In 1960 the Cadet position was introduced followed by the Police Trainee Program in 1964. These initiatives had the dual benefit of providing a pool of “civilian” employees to perform non-enforcement duties while at the same time maintaining a roster of candidates interested in pursuing a uniformed police career. Despite this new hiring activity, there was little increase in the number of civilian employees. In 1960 there were 23,515 uniformed officers and 1,114 civilians (95.6% vs. 4.4%). Five years later there were 27,030 uniformed and 1,340 civilian members (95.8% vs. 4.2%). The increase in the number of civilians in 1965 was likely due to the hiring of police trainees who were considered “civilian” employees.

In 1968, a civilian position was created to broaden job specifications and increase the latitude that management has in assigning duties and work hours. The department was also attempting to attract better educated professional civilian employees. Eligibility requirements were more stringent than for other clerical positions and the title included age range limits (19 to 29 years of age). The first written test for the title of Police Administrative Aide was given in March 1968; women were not permitted to apply. Forty men were hired from the first list and Police Administrative Aide has grown to

become the predominant civilian title in the police department. The title was opened to women in 1970 and today it is primarily staffed by women.

In 1968 Chief of Personnel George McManus requested the establishment of the title of Senior Police Administrative Aide with the goal of developing a career path for this new cadre of civilian employees. From all appearances it looked as though there was interest in cultivating a group of career civilian employees. Although the title of Senior PAA was created in 1969, it was not until 1972 that a test was actually given, and no further promotional step was provided in the job specifications. Suddenly, the hoped for career ladder turned into a step stool.

At the beginning of the decade of the 1970's uniformed strength reached 31,859 with 2,159 civilians (93.7% vs. 6.3%). The following years were very tumultuous for all City employees. A massive plan to hire 2,300 civilian employees began in 1972. By 1974 there was a deep hiring freeze. On June 30, 1975, the last day of the fiscal year, the City proceeded with the layoff of thousands of City employees. Beginning at midnight and continuing throughout the next day, the teletype machines in police precincts clicked away at the names of over 5,000 police officers who were being immediately laid off. A group of civilian employees was also among the layoffs. Some of the laid off police officers and civilians were shortly rehired under the Federal government's Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA). The Federal government initiated several different plans to subsidize civilianization in the NYPD in the 1970's. Restrictions and limitations written into this legislation only resulted in the hiring of a transitory workforce to supplement what had been growing into a permanent corps of career civilian employees.

In 1981, Police Commissioner Robert McGuire developed a plan to maximize the use of civilian employees and integrate them into the fabric of the Police Department. Pamela Delaney, the first Director of Civilianization, coordinated the effort to study both the history and progress of civilianization in the NYPD. The resulting report, in part sought, "...an explanation for the appearance of the limited success of civilianization goals." Acknowledging the slow rate of change in bureaucracies, the report suggested three additional factors which must be considered when examining the slow rate of civilianization in the NYPD: money, manpower and opposition.

As an economic measure, civilianization results in cost savings only if there are available funds to hire civilians at the outset. In the past, budget restrictions and hiring freezes have limited the advancement of civilians in the NYPD. However, once funding has been allocated, there must be a sufficient pool of qualified candidates available for hiring. Delays in the promulgation of civil service lists have impeded the implementation of past civilianization plans. The Police Department initiated a substantial recruitment effort in 1980 to attract qualified candidates to the Police Administrative Aide test. The effort proved to be very productive and cost effective, but has never been repeated.

The 1981 report also considered the third and very important factor: opposition. According to the report, "...the resistance of police officers, police unions and police management was noted as the foremost reason for deficiencies in the civilianization program." But very little hard evidence of uniformed resistance was uncovered in the

research. In what amounted to a very successful effort to blunt uniformed resistance, Police Commissioner McGuire let the word out to all commanding officers. He let them know that one of the dimensions that they will be evaluated on especially when being considered for promotion, will be the progress and efficacy of civilianization efforts in their command. Resistance broke down and opportunities for civilians expanded throughout the department.

Civilianization may have been viewed as a threat to the stability of the organization because civilian employees were unknown quantities to many uniformed supervisors; a perception which sometimes exists even today. The introduction of civilian employees to what had always been uniformed work areas created a change in the work environment that probably raised fear of loss of control and discipline during the early years of civilianization. Civilian members were tolerated without being nurtured. In spite of such drawbacks, thousands of civilian members continued to work to the best of their ability and were proud to claim that they were part of the NYPD.

A major criticism of civilianization is that civil service rules and union contracts severely limit managerial flexibility in the assignment of civilian employees. Sometimes, it is these same constraints which put limitations on the advancement of civilians. There are eleven promotional steps on the career ladder for uniformed members of the service. Promotional opportunities for civilian members are probably better than they have ever been, but rising the career ladder for civilians remains challenging and difficult.

In 1977, the New York City Department of Personnel (referred to as DCAS today), consolidated nearly one hundred job titles into fifteen. The police administrative aide occupational group was not included into this "broadbanding" initiative due to the uniqueness of job assignments and work schedules. In 1978 however, senior PAA's were included in the direct line of promotion to principal administrative associate which then led to eligibility to take the administrative manager examination. Now an actual career path was created.

In the four decades plus of the modern day timeline of civilianization, many members have elevated to the top of their areas and their success is a testament to their determination and perseverance to excel under challenging circumstances.

Today practically all of the nearly two hundred civilian job titles in the Police Department have a promotional career ladder. Civilian career development can be twofold. A career path entails moving to different job assignments to gain experience with the possibility of merit pay or a provisional appointment. A career ladder involves advancement in job title and pay scale. It is one of the goals of the ACES club to be a source of information regarding career advancement opportunities.

It is the responsibility of every civilian employee to maintain a level of personal excellence and to take an active role in the advancement of their own career.