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Holden police chief has a criminal collection

Put the billy club to Holden's chief and he'll show you his historic stash

WHERE WE LIVE

By Lisa D. Welsh TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

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HOLDEN — Pre-handcuff era “come-alongs” and “thumb-cuffs,” antique badges and the occasional Dick Tracey classic tin riot car are among Holden Police Chief George R. Sherrill’s law enforcement collection that might be on its way to Washington, D.C.

Chief Sherrill has been collecting artifacts throughout his 32 years as a police officer and most will be on display in the new public safety building in town. But several items are being coveted by the National Law Enforcement Museum planned for Judiciary Square in Washington and scheduled to open in 2013.

Chief Sherrill is in Washington this week to discuss the museum’s wish list of items. Some artifacts will be on loan and remain the property of the town, while others from his personal collection will be donated.

“George has a really fun collection,” said Laurie A. Baty, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund’s senior director of museum programs.

In space that looks very much like a small law enforcement museum itself, Chief Sherrill’s office displays artifacts of women matrons next to those from 1890s African-American officers. Replaced by technology are radars and old radios, light bars and mounted sirens. A dummy used in target practice sits in one corner of the police station and the door to a police cruiser in another.



Holden Police Chief George R. Sherrill shows police artifacts to Laurie A. Baty, senior director of museum programs for the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, who is working on the creation of the National Law Enforcement Museum. Chief Sherrill is donating items from his personal collection to the museum; other artifacts will be on loan and remain the property of the town. (ED COLLIER)

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"It's similar in that almost every police department has someone interested in law enforcement and who is a collector. Everybody has handcuffs, a bubble gum light, various patches and badges," said Ms. Baty. "But George's is very specific to Holden. We're thrilled that he has given as much as he can."

The \$50 million, 55,000-square-foot, three-level museum is Ms. Baty's latest project after working for other cultural institutions including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, both in Washington.

"I want it to be world class, and having worked at the Holocaust Museum I have an idea of what that means, with a rotating exhibit and core exhibit," said Ms. Baty. "One of my best relationships so far has been with Holden."

The museum has requested 25 items from Chief Sherrill's collection. Of particular interest is a bedroom door splattered with dried blood from a 1994 murder scene in town. Then-police Sgt. Sherrill dusted the door for fingerprints that proved a suspect was on the premises and helped make a conviction.

"It was just the beginning of blood splatter trajectory analysis," said Chief Sherrill. "They toyed around with fingerprinting in the '50s, '60s and '70s, but in the 1980s policing became scientific. It was still way before computers in the cars or what you see on television shows like 'CSI.'"

Chief Sherrill thinks the evidence will serve a better purpose at the national museum.

"This is the pride of the department, the pride of the community, but most of this stuff is stored in attics and no one sees it," he said.

"It's nice that it will be used in a museum of this quality. Right now I'm just saving stuff. They will preserve it."

Another museum dedicated to law enforcement is being built in Central Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts State Police Museum and Learning Center at the former state police barracks in Grafton on Route 140 is estimated to cost \$2 million, down from its original \$15 million budget announced three years ago.

About \$300,000 has been raised, including through a state trooper payroll deduction in which 500 of 2,500 current troopers have signed up to have \$3 deducted each pay period. A second payroll fundraising effort began two weeks ago.

"Our mission is to preserve the proud history of the oldest state police organization in the country," said William F. Gearin, co-chairman of the museum committee, noting that the agency was established in 1865 as the State Constabulary.

"There's a lot of historical memorabilia that we have that we don't want to see lost or destroyed."

Ready to take their place in the state museum are antique weapons, horse saddles, a steering wheel circa-1920 from the state's first police boat, several vintage police cruisers and Harley-Davidson

The National Law Enforcement Museum

Location:

Washington, D.C., adjacent to National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial

Purpose:

To tell the story of law enforcement through exhibits, artifacts and educational programming

Size:

55,000 square feet on three levels

Schedule:

Construction slated to begin next year with completion in mid-2013

Cost:

\$50 million; more than \$37 million has been raised to date

Source: National Law Enforcement Museum
T&G Staff/VILAYPHET KRUCOCH

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The learning center named after Major John F. Regan will provide numerous opportunities, Mr. Gearin said, for those considering a law enforcement career or for hosting seminars on drug, alcohol and sexual predator awareness.

“We want kids coming from the high schools every day of the week,” he said.

The original plan called for a new facility to be built on five acres behind the Grafton barracks. But the economy’s downturn has forced organizers to change plans and rehabilitate the original barracks instead. The goal remains the same.

“There’s a rich history and we want to capture it,” said Edward Montague, museum curator, who will be donating 250 police badges of the 13,000 that he has collected since 1978.

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