

A Look Back

Given the fact POAO is celebrating 50 years of being established, some information has been gathered from the archives. This is the first of a series of articles, which take a glimpse back into time.

POAO 1952-1955

The genesis of an association began at the suggestion of a Delinquency Control Committee meeting held on March 8, 1951. The Probation Officers of Family and Juvenile Courts still felt the need of an association where they could discuss common problems, procedure and practices.

Don Coughlan was appointed as the Director of Probation Services for the Province of Ontario in January 1952. He originated the calling of the first Probation Officers Meeting of Ontario. In correspondence to a guest speaker at the meeting scheduled for September 8-12, 1952 he states that he had traveled around the province and was quite disturbed at the lack of training and sparse knowledge of the sixty officers at that time. Forty male officers were allowed to attend with expenses covered by the Department, not intentionally through discrimination but due to financial convenience to hold the meeting at the Provincial Police College in Toronto. A pre-meeting 27-item questionnaire was sent out with participants expected to come prepared to discuss solutions. Some of the items identified 50 years ago included issues about: what is probation, has a long or short term order of probation been found most useful, maximum caseload, service affected by inadequate office space, equipment, lack of proper psychiatric service, procedures for non payment of restitution by juveniles, domestic relations, should the province take over the entire field of probation and make all probation officers civil servants, should juvenile and family court probation be separate from adult probation, and of course forming a probation officers association for the province. In 1954 there were 7,663 convicts placed on probation, of which 5003 were adults and 2660 were juveniles.

The inaugural meeting of the Probation Officers Association of the Province of Ontario was held September 8-12, 1952 at the Ontario provincial Police College in Toronto. An elected provincial executive consisted of president, two vice presidents (specified as a male and female position), a secretary-treasurer, and representatives (2) two adult PO's, CAS and Family Courts. Five positions were added as regional representatives. Annual dues fees were set at \$3.00 per year, and then raised to \$5.00 per year in 1954. A provisional constitution was developed in 1953. By 1955 out of a potential 110 members 48 had joined, (44%). The account balance was \$96.54. Agenda items consisted of: a directory of Probation Officers, development of statistical report (intake) forms, advocacy for consistency of salaries, access to a secretary for all officers, proposals for amendments to the Criminal Code, recommendations about eligibility for promotion from grade I PO to grade II after a minimum 2 years service and investigation of insurance coverage for transporting clients in personal vehicles. 1954 marked the first publication of a newsletter entitled "Reporting Day".

What struck me was the fact that the need to advocate for ourselves was just as high or higher then as it is now. More to follow....

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