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Old Coppers' Stories
Two Original Members of the Force
Tell Some Good Tales
Lively Times In The Sixties
Ex-Sergeant Pierce and Policeman Brown Are Among the Oldest
Members of the District Police Force – Pierce Used to Have
Trouble with Fractious Soldiers, While Private Brown Had His
Hands Full Subduing Drunken Sailors

Godwin Pierce, one of the original members of the District police force, was born in Philadelphia sixty-eight years ago. In 1850 he left that City of Brotherly Love and came to Washington to find work at his trade, which is that of a brick maker. He joined the volunteer fire department, and rendered good service, and at the present time he is one of the prominent members of the Veteran Volunteer Firemen's Association. He now resides at 417 Eleventh street southwest.

He was appointed on the force on the morning of September 11, 1861, and was assigned for duty at what was then designated as the Seventh precinct, but which is known at present as the Fifth precinct. The Baltimore and Ohio depot was in the northwest boundary of the precinct, and here Mr. Pierce was detailed for duty as a roundsman. George Coons was then the passenger agent at the depot, and he had a lively time of it as soldiers daily poured in and out of the city over the road. His most troublesome and exciting times of any during his long service was with the soldiers, who were disposed to laugh at civil authority, and do exactly what they pleased. They made the life of a roundsman anything but pleasant, and took occasion to violate the city ordinances at every opportunity, especially when there was a likelihood of fun to result.

The most stirring incidents happened in the early years of the war, and the events came close upon one another. Time has had an effect also, and Sergt. Pierce is able to remember only a few of the many things that occurred.

A Fight With Soldiers

In the early part of the war the military was especially alert for spies, and in order to bring their detection down to a fine point, people purchasing tickets at the depot were forced to pass in single file before a line of soldiers, who stood directly in front of the ticket seller, and so close to his office that there was only room for one person to pass. On this occasion Sergt. Milstead, who was in charge of the police of the Fifth precinct, attempted to get a woman through about the center of the line, a large crowd being in regular order waiting for their turn. The soldiers objected to the woman coming in ahead in that manner, and the result was a few words, which ended up in a scrap.

Sergt. Milstead and Policeman Pierce attempted to arrest a belligerent soldier and his comrades jumped in the melee to rescue him. The police pluckily held on to their man, and carried him away, and when brought before old 'Squire Ferguson he was sent to jail for assault.

Gen. Andrew Porter, then provost marshal, hearing of the matter, demanded his release, but 'Squire Ferguson flatly refused to do this. Seeing that he could do nothing, Gen. Porter asked Mr. Webb to secure the release of the soldier, and upon the request of the then superintendent of police, the man was released, a sadder and wiser individual. Sergt. Milstead engendered a

good deal of hatred on this account, and for three days he had to be kept in hiding, the soldiers being after him.

Among the many soldiers camped in the city at the time, a regiment was located where the Grant row is now erected. Where the Washington Hall now stands an old hostelry was formerly located known as the Admiral House. This was at the corner of Pennsylvania avenue and Third street southeast. A company of soldiers from the above located regiment was in the hostelry, and were raising a lively disturbance. The police were sent for to quell the matter, and Sergt. Pierce and another private responded to the call. They found that the soldiers were making havoc in the place, and they attempted to arrest a couple of the men. They were set upon, and beaten badly, and were unable to arrest any of the offenders of law and order. The matter created quite a stir at the time, and as some of the soldiers were recognized, a court-martial was convened to try them. Fifteen men were summoned before the body, but the matter was abruptly ended by the ordering of the entire regiment away from the city to enter the field for active duty.

A Score of Murder Cases

Sergt. Pierce has a number of reminiscences of policing in ye olden times, which if written out, would make a volume of extremely interesting reading. During his time on the force he has been connected with no less than twenty murder cases, and he was the man who traced the murder of an old peddler in a house on E street, between Ninth and Tenth streets, to Tom Wright, who subsequently paid the penalty of his crime. He also had the pistol which Booth used when he shot Lincoln.

For his meritorious services he was promoted to the rank of sergeant, but during the superintendency of Maj. Dye, through personal motives, he was reduced to the ranks. Commissioners Wheatly and Webb both wanted to restore him to his position, but he preferred a second class policeship, with duty at the District Building, where he has been stationed since 1878.

Officer Brown's Good Record

Policeman Augustus Brown is about the oldest of any of the original surviving members of the force. He was seventy years of age the 4th of last March, and was born on the day that John Quincy Adams was inaugurated in the White House. He is a native of this vicinity, and prior to joining the police force was a carpenter of some note, having worked on a number of buildings in both Washington and Georgetown. He was a member of the old corporation police force of Georgetown, before the organization of the Metropolitan police force, and upon the organization of the last named body he was one of the few members of the old force to join.

For thirty-four years he has held the position, and only once has he been before the trial board, and that not for any neglect of duty. This was during the war, and the police, at that time, served two weeks' of day duty and then switched around for night duty for the same length of time. A building of Thomas Dowling, the auctioneer, which was located back of the present M street Market House, was destroyed, and Brown and another man took the contract to rebuild it. Brown worked during the day when it was his night duty, and during the two weeks he was on day duty, work on the building was suspended. The building was nearly completed when some one reported that Brown was holding down two jobs, and he was accordingly summoned

before the trial board. He admitted the charges, and was fined \$10. This was the first and only time he has ever been brought before that body.

For a man of his age he is a remarkably active individual, and his sprightliness is something surprising. He can make as lively an attempt at dancing in the old-fashioned way as any youthful dandy today, and his capers are amusing. He is full of wit, and can crack a joke with the best of punsters. During the entire time he has been on the force he has had excellent health, and his total time off duty on account of sickness for the thirty-four years is something less than three months. For the past four years he has not enjoyed a day off duty on furlough.

His precinct was what is now the Seventh precinct, then known as the Third precinct, and embraced substantially the same area. Georgetown, at that time, was the commercial center of the District, and its wharves were lined at all hours with coastwise and foreign vessels. The sailors proved to be a tough lot to handle, and while Sergt. Pierce found trouble with the soldiers, Policeman Brown had considerable more difficulty with the stars of the ocean. At their hands he has been beaten and maltreated and abused, but somehow he always managed to come out ahead in a scrimmage.

He was a well put up man at the time but there were some sailors whom he did not care to tackle except in a case of extreme push. On one occasion three powerfully built sailors walking along Water street, then the principal business street, were engaged in a drunken altercation, and insulted people who passed by. A woman came by soon afterward with a basket upon her arm, and a rude remark was made to her. She called upon Officer Brown for protection, and he attempted to arrest the ring leader of the gang. The other two jumped on him, bent on rescuing their partner, and while Brown was on top of his man, the other two were on top of Brown, pounding him at a lively rate. He was in danger of being seriously hurt, and a crowd of business men came to the rescue, while some one sent word to the station for the relief force. The citizens managed to hold on to one of the sailors, while the third man wriggling from the grasp of his captors sped away. Brown held on to his man, though considerably the worse for the tussle, and when the relief came upon the scene, he was leading his man to the lockup, while several citizens held the other man.

How He Lost His Hat

His memory of the early events in the history of the force is somewhat clogged. He remembers that the men were without uniforms, and that a small band of ribbon was worn around the hat to designate whom they were. The night of September 11, 1861, the first night of the life of the present force, was a rough night and one long to be remembered. It rained in great torrents, and was cold, the dampness penetrating to the skin.

Brown and his partner, were then on the "Herring hill" beat, and to escape the weather and warm up a little, entered a house to hug the fire for a few moments. Brown inadvertently placed his hat to dry on the stove pipe, and while talking forgot all about the tile. While he was ready to go out he was dismayed to find that it had been burned up forcing him to borrow a hat from the host for the emergency.