

## The Florida Sheriffs Bureau: Where it all began



*David Brand, FSA*

*The Florida Sheriffs Bureau, organized in 1955, was the first state-wide criminal investigation agency developed specifically to assist local law enforcement with complex cases. Headquartered in Tallahassee, it sent personnel trained in forensics and investigations all over the state.*

In Florida, our county sheriffs are independently elected by the citizens they serve. The first sheriffs were appointed in 1821 by Territorial Governor Andrew Jackson. The Florida Sheriffs Association (FSA) was created in 1893 to provide a collective voice for the sheriffs. The FSA is now recognized as the largest and most politically influential sheriffs' association in the United States serves as the sheriffs' de facto headquarters in Tallahassee. In 1955, the FSA was instrumental in creating the Florida Sheriffs Bureau that provided forensic, technical, and investigative expertise for local law enforcement making it, in effect, the first state-wide major crimes investigation agency.

### *The Genesis*

In 1953, the Florida Legislature debated creating a state police force after its proposal by Attorney General Richard Ervin.<sup>1</sup> This initiative was met with resistance by Florida sheriffs who were concerned a state police department would overstep into county criminal investigations and possibly create a political divide. Without the support of the sheriffs, who were very politically influential within their respective counties, the initiative faded away.

Due to a continued need, the issue was once again brought before the legislature in 1955. Attorney General Ervin, possibly recognizing that the bill needed the support of the sheriffs, commented that he favored a Bureau over a state police force because it preserved local law enforcement.<sup>2</sup> As such, the legislature created the Florida Sheriffs Bureau on October 1, 1955.

The members of the original Board were: Leslie Bessenger, Pasco County sheriff; Ed Blackburn, Jr, Hillsborough County sheriff; Dale Carson, Duval County sheriff; Broward Coker, Highlands County sheriff; Governor LeRoy Collins; Attorney General Richard William Ervin; Don Genung, Pinellas County sheriff; Jack Madigan, Tallahassee attorney; Don McLeod, Marion County

sheriff; John Maloney Spottswood, Monroe County sheriff; and George Watts, Washington County sheriff.<sup>3</sup>



*The original Board of the Florida Sheriffs Bureau*

Governor Collins called upon the Florida Sheriffs Association to pick the Bureau Director leading to Sheriff Don McLeod, Marion County sheriff, being appointed as the first Director.<sup>4</sup>

*Director Don McLeod*



Beginning with five employees in 1955, the Bureau expanded to 36 by 1958 as their responsibilities and outreach continued to increase.<sup>5</sup> Within the first few years, the Bureau increased their technical support by adding several laboratory functions.

The first state Identification Section for fingerprint retention and identification was established when Albert B. Ground, a thirty-year veteran of fingerprint identification, was hired. Mr. Ground participated in an agreement between the Bureau and the Florida Prison System, now known as the Department of Corrections, to incorporate the prison's fingerprint files into the Bureau's files.<sup>6</sup> A Document Examination Section was added to assist with forgeries and bank fraud. John Foy was the examiner in 1958.<sup>7</sup> Ron Dick, a retired Royal Canadian Mounted Police Officer, was added to the staff later. A Training Section was established in 1958 headed by E. Berwin Williams who later became the Executive Director of the Florida Sheriffs Association; 1977-1988. Special Agent Emory Williams also began his Bureau career in the Training Section.<sup>8</sup> A Modus Operandi Section, that served to develop intelligence information on known criminals and their methods, was headed by James P. Hendrick, Jr. Additionally, a Ballistics Section, for firearms identification, was created. Leslie L. Smith, a recently retired Lieutenant with the New York City Police Department, developed that section. Mr. Smith's career began in 1934 and he rose through the ranks of the NYPD detective bureau.<sup>9</sup>

James Halligan, Jr., a former WW2 fighter pilot, was brought in from his previous position as a scientist with the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory to establish the Bureau's crime lab. Highly experienced in both laboratory examinations and crime scene investigation, Jim Halligan was the perfect fit to begin the Bureau's new crime lab from scratch.<sup>10</sup> He later became an adjunct instructor at Florida State University where he taught legions of criminology students.

Eddie Boone, later Leon County sheriff, was trained at a young age as a fingerprint examiner by the FBI in Washington D.C. After two years with the FBI, he was recruited by the Florida Sheriffs Bureau in 1959 as a fingerprint examiner. The Bureau had 12 special agents at the time all with previous law enforcement experience. Wanting to become a special agent, Mr. Boone applied and was hired as a Bay County deputy sheriff under Sheriff Charlie Abbott. After two years in Bay County, he was appointed a Leon County deputy sheriff under Sheriff Bill Joyce where he stayed for four years before being appointed a Bureau special agent. In 1967, he was one of the agents that were absorbed into what is presently known as the Florida Department of Law Enforcement eventually becoming the Special Agent in Charge in Tallahassee before being elected sheriff of Leon County.<sup>11</sup>

The original Sheriffs Bureau office was a remodeled residence located on Gaines St. near South Monroe St. When they outgrew the original office, they moved into the Carlton Building in the downtown Capitol Complex area. Continuing to grow, with responsibilities increasing, they moved into the Bryant Building.

### *Achieving National Attention*

When one judge plots the murder of another judge it gets national attention.

In 1955, Joe Peel was a lawyer and part-time municipal judge handling misdemeanor cases in West Palm Beach. He also had a secret life providing protection for West Palm Beach's murky underworld of numbers rackets and moonshining. His unlawful activities were bringing in as much as \$3,000.00 a week. However, his criminal enterprise was being threatened by the respected and incorruptible Circuit Judge Curtis E. Chillingworth. Judge Chillingworth was from an influential family. His grandfather had been sheriff of Dade County and later the first mayor of West Palm Beach. His father had been the first municipal attorney for both Lantana and West Palm Beach.

To solve the problem of his unlawful activities being revealed, Pell recruited Floyd "Lucky" Holzapfel, a local organized crime figure, along with Bobby Lincoln, who ran the bolita racket in Riviera's black community, to kill Chillingworth.

On the night of June 14, 1955, the Chillingworths were the guests of honor at a Palm Beach party celebrating the 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the judge's appointment to the bench. Around 9:30pm they left the party and drove to their beach cottage in Manalapan. Their three young daughters were at the family's home in West Palm Beach. After they had gone to bed, there was a knock on the door. When Judge Chillingworth answered the door, Holzapfel and Lincoln barged into

the home taking the pair hostage. The two then taped Mr. and Mrs. Chillingworth's hands behind their backs and gagged them. Next, the pair began walking the Chillingworths to the beach where they had a small boat. Both Mr. and Mrs. Chillingworth were able to loosen the binds around their mouths. Mrs. Chillingworth shouted out and Holzapfel struck her on the head with a revolver leaving blood stains at the scene. They were then taken out in the boat into the Gulf Stream. Mrs. Chillingworth was pushed out and Judge Chillingworth jumped into the water attempting to save her. The abducting pair grabbed the judge, weighted him down with an anchor, and pushed him away to his death. The bodies were never recovered. After years of investigation, bolstered by a huge reward totaling \$179,000.00 from a variety of sources, the case remained unsolved.



Years later, the Florida Sheriffs Bureau sent Special Agent Henry Lovern to Palm Beach County to investigate. Special Agent Lovern presented himself as a slow talking, aw shucks, good ole boy from Tallahassee. It was all an act.

By recruiting informants, and playing some of the criminal figures against each other, Lovern set up a meeting between Holzapfel and two informants in September, 1960, in a Melbourne motel room. The room was wired for sound with Lovern in the next room recording every alcohol induced word. When the meeting ended, Lovern had the entire story of the homicides on tape resulting in the arrests of Holzapfel and Peel. Holzapfel was sentenced to the electric chair. On June 24, 1982, Peel was released from prison terminally ill with cancer. Before he died, he confessed his role in the murders.<sup>12</sup>

Henry Lovern later left the Bureau to accept another position in law enforcement.



*Special Agent Henry Lovern, shown here second from left, discussing who should be the recipient of the reward money in the Chillingworth case. Photo taken February 26, 1963 at the Leon County Courthouse.*

### *The First Academy*

As the Bureau continued to evolve, Bureau staff traveled around the state delivering technical courses to local officers with what became known as their “Road Show.” These courses included photography, crime scene investigation, ballistics, and numerous other topics.<sup>13</sup>

Recognizing the need for a brick and mortar academy, the Bureau built the Florida Law Enforcement Academy in Tallahassee. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on August 22, 1963 with Attorney General Richard Ervin and Leon County Sheriff Bill Joyce speaking.<sup>14</sup> The academy was located on Capital Circle southwest near the intersection of Lake Bradford Rd.<sup>15</sup> This represented the first professional law enforcement academy for local law enforcement officers in Florida.



*Leon County Sheriff Bill Joyce, left, and Attorney General Richard Ervin speak at the groundbreaking of the Florida Law Enforcement Academy in Tallahassee.*

### *The Tallahassee 7000 Television Series*

The Bureau’s investigative activities attracted the attention of Hollywood. A television series was created, *Tallahassee 7000*, starring veteran actor and later academy award winner Walter Matthau. 7000 was the Bureau’s telephone number. It ran for one season in 1961. The series was filmed on location in Florida where Special Agent Lex Rogers, played by Walter Matthau, traveled the state investigating major crimes. One episode, *The Men from Tallahassee*, about a murder in Miami was aired May 30, 1961. Walter Matthau’s opening line was “Miami, Florida...where the oranges and tourists are freshly squeezed every day.”<sup>16</sup>



*A promotional advertisement for Tallahassee 7000*

Click the link below for an episode of the series.

<https://youtu.be/TZdZlYdx8l4>

### *The Birth of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement*

During his inaugural speech on January 3, 1967, Governor Claude Kirk declared a war on crime. He also announced his War on Crime Program that included the investigation of major crimes. To accomplish this, he appointed Mr. George Wackenhut, president of the large Wackenhut private investigations firm, Program Director and announced that he would be hiring Wackenhut agents to conduct investigations.

According to former Special Agent Eddie Boone, later Leon County Sheriff, private investigators would be investigating the same cases that Bureau agents were resulting in confusing and perhaps dangerous situations. Additionally, the private investigators had no official standing to obtain subpoenas from the state attorneys or search warrants from the courts.

The Florida legislature took note of these circumstances and, through the legislative process, created the Florida Bureau of Investigation by combining the Sheriffs Bureau, the State Narcotics Bureau, and the law enforcement activities of the Attorney General's Anti-Bookie Squad. After undergoing a couple of name changes, it eventually became the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

### *The Sheriffs Role*

“The role sheriffs have played in the enforcement of laws in our state over the past two centuries is legendary. As elected officials designated as the ‘chief law enforcement officers’ within their counties, they have always had a vested interest in the development of partnerships with the State of Florida ensuring that criminals are brought to justice. The story of the creation and development of the Florida Sheriffs Bureau in conjunction with the Governor and Attorney General is a prime example of how sheriffs, via the FSA, have partnered with state government officials at the highest level to meet the expanding needs of the criminal justice system in our state over the decades. At the FSA, we are honored to tell the story and pay homage to these visionary leaders.”

*Sheriffs Leading, Uniting, and Protecting since 1821*  
*Steve Casey, Executive Director*  
*Florida Sheriffs Association*



### *Special Acknowledgements*

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Sheriff (Retired) Eddie Boone



Sheriff Eddie Boone had a long, impressive career beginning with the FBI before becoming a Bureau Special Agent, the Special Agent in Charge of the Tallahassee office of the FDLE, and Leon County sheriff.

Mr. Emory Williams



Mr. Emory Williams, another of the original Bureau Special Agents, went on to cofound the Institute for Intergovernmental Research, an internationally recognized think tank and training organization with offices in Tallahassee, Washington D.C., and Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tallahassee Democrat* September 1, 1955 page 1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> [www.floridamemory.com](http://www.floridamemory.com) Group portrait of original members from the Sheriff's Bureau Tallahassee, Fl 1960

<sup>4</sup> Boone, Eddie Personal interview June 3, 2021

<sup>5</sup> *Sheriffs Star* November, 1958

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Williams, Emory Personal interview June 4, 2021

<sup>9</sup> *Sheriffs Star* March, 1959 page 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Sheriffs Star* November, 1958 page 5.

<sup>11</sup> Boone, Eddie Personal interview June 3, 2021

<sup>12</sup> Mclver, Stuart *Sun Sentinel* "Deadly Judgement" January 8, 1989

<sup>13</sup> *Sheriffs Star* May, 1959 page 2.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Boone, Eddie Personal interview June 3, 2021

<sup>16</sup> [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)