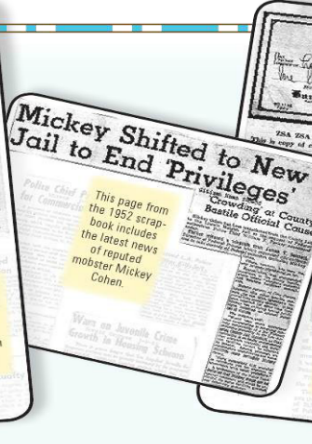


History Comes Alive!

Tales From the City Archives

by Michael E. Holland
City Archivist



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There are few Los Angeles institutions more popular to the film and television industry than the Los Angeles Police Dept. The people who protect the nation's second largest city never cease to fascinate the tellers of both fictional drama and those trying to tell the story of the City through a specific historical lens. I just wish the media's production budgets allowed a bit more time and money for research, since the end results usually show a lack of due diligence. That's too bad, because there are so many resources in Los Angeles to choose from, and that includes the Los Angeles City Archives.



William H. Parker, former LAPD Chief of Police.

committing the crimes and who made the arrests. They were collected and assembled in chronological order and can be very useful to follow a specific event instead of going through months' worth of microfilm.

The effect of William H. Parker becoming Chief of Police was immediate on our archival materials. For the year that *Mob City* opens, 1947, the annual report is 164 pages of densely packed tables, charts and graphs with incredible detail including which hours of what days of the week were most likely to have crime take

to do an almost impossible task. One example that year was the recruitment process in which 6,448 applicants began the selection process and only 196 survived all the exams, training and probation for a paltry 3.8 percent acceptance rate. So the annual report became a tool to promote support for the department. But the statistics weren't forgotten. They became their own published report known as the Statistical Digest and are also in the archives.

Meanwhile, the scrapbooks included clippings of crooked cops being arrested and prosecuted for a variety of crimes in addition to the petty criminals and organized criminals working in the City. Chief Parker seemed to have given the PID the ability to include the dark side of the police force in their efforts. The scrapbooks of the 1950s and 1960s give

a more complete look at what the LAPD brass saw and considered important, whereas the late 1940s books dealt more with trade show-type events than department activity.

The greatest shot in the arm for morale came in the form of *Dragnet*. First as a radio show in 1950 and later as the iconic television show, *Dragnet* has its own scrapbook in the archive with press releases, comic book strips and even real crime reporting written in the same deadpan style popularized by the show.

The image of the straight-arrow cop being the ultimate professional could not have been further from the sad truth that still existed in the 1950s. The annual reports and scrapbooks carried the message that crime of all kinds continued to increase while manpower decreased to 1.88 officers per 1000 citizens. The imagery and photographs in the reports paint a portrait of a city under siege but fighting back, as in a crusade, with new tools and knowledge. But the next page revealed a need for more of everything to keep pace with the criminals and a growing population of citizens.

If *Mob City* gets renewed, I hope the research staff will pay me a visit. There are enough real-life stories here that would support the story they are trying to tell if they are serious of showing the post-war evolution of both William H. Parker and the LAPD into the local history they are today.

LAPD History in the Archives

There's a trove of the Police Dept.'s history in the City Archives.

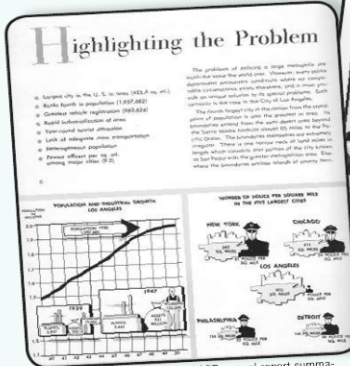
There is a new crime show on cable network TNT called *Mob City* that aired back in December. Taking place in Los Angeles starting in 1947 with the occasional flashbacks to earlier days, the show follows the efforts of a crime unit dedicated to keeping the mobsters including Mickey Cohen at bay and, the force hoped, out of the City altogether. But the story includes corrupt cops and politicians as you might expect in a story such as this one. The basic facts are somewhat based on a book written by John Buntin called *L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City*, published in 2009.

First disclosure: John Buntin spent some time with us here at the Archives researching his book. Second disclosure: My wife is a television critic who visited the show set and saw some clips last summer as they were beginning production. Buntin studied several of our archival resources for his book; among them were the LAPD annual reports and the LAPD scrapbooks.

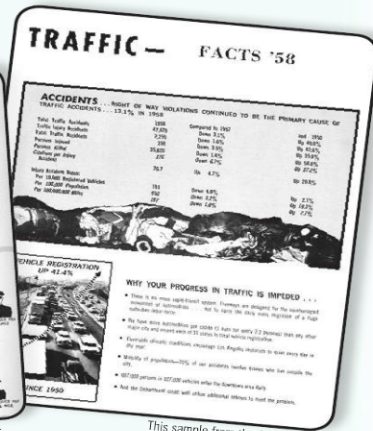
The annual report is required under the City Charter to keep the mayor, City Council and other officials aware of what the department considers necessary to do the public's business. The annual reports represent everything the Police Dept. did in the previous year using statistics covering numbers of crimes reported, arrests made and dollars spent. The scrapbook program was started in 1947 by the Public Relations office for in-house purposes. The books contain clippings from most, if not all, of the local daily newspapers, highlighting who was

place (Saturday evenings accounted for 17 percent of all crimes committed that year. Sundays as a whole were a close second at 15 percent). There was no public relations spin in the report.

That had changed by 1950, Parker's first year on the job. The Public Relations office became known as Public Information Division under the new Bureau of Administration. Now the role of the annual report was to highlight the department itself and what role it played in our public safety, quality of life and why it needed more resources



This page from a 1950 LAPD annual report summarizes the challenges facing the department.



This sample from the 1958 LAPD annual report lists traffic statistics.