

Growth of Motor Vehicles Department Reflects Automotive History of State

Former Carthage Resident Heads 528-Man Patrol

The Department of Motor Vehicles was created by a special act of the 1941 General Assembly, and made effective as of July 1, 1941. It consists of three major units that were originally functions of the Department of Revenue — the Registration Division, the State Highway Patrol and the Highway Safety Division.

A fourth unit, smaller than the others, is the License and Theft Enforcement Division (formerly called the Theft Bureau).

Also responsible to the commissioner, but not large enough to have division status are the public relations office, the bus and truck franchise unit and the reports audit unit.

The Department is headed by Commissioner L. R. Fisher and Assistant Commissioner Joe W. Garrett. Division heads are Col. W. B. Lentz of the Highway Patrol; H. D. Tarvia Jones of the Highway Safety Division; and Miss Fcy Ingram of the Registration Division.

Archie M. Gilbert is director of the License and Theft Enforcement Division.

The Department of Motor Vehicles is a comparatively new organization. As mentioned, it was created in 1941 to take over the duties of the Highway Patrol and the Highway Safety Division (then one unit) and the Registration Division. The Patrol and Safety Division were subsequently separated in 1949.

Prior to 1941 these divisions had been under the Revenue Department.

Registration Division: On July 1, 1909, a systematic registration of automobiles in North Carolina was begun. By legislative enactment, motor vehicle owners were required to secure a Certificate of Registration from the Secretary of State. They were required to pay a flat fee of \$5, good for one year, and thereafter a renewal fee of \$1. In payment of these fees the Secretary of State issued the certificate along with a seal of aluminum, or other suitable metal, showing the registration number. Upon receipt of this seal the motorist was required to make a distinctive license plate, using Arabic numerals at least three inches high and one-half inch wide. The choice of colors was uniquely simple: black and white. Although the tag could be either white with black numerals or black with white numerals. Total registration figure for the first year was 1,681.

Until 1913 auto owners continued to make their own license plates and pay minimum license fees. After 1913 however, it was decided to have the state furnish the plate and increased fees of from \$5 to \$10 were set up depending on horsepower rating. In 1921 a one-cent-per-gallon tax was put on gasoline and in 1927 license taxes increased to a minimum of \$12.50 and a maximum of \$40.

In 1923 a Certificate of Title law was enacted and a Theft Bureau created. Registration by this time had reached a total of 211,732.

The Motor Vehicle Registration Division was divorced from the Secretary of State in 1925 and assigned to the revenue department

PATROL CHIEF



COL. W. B. LENTZ, head of the State Highway Patrol, lived at the McLeod boarding-house in Carthage in the 1920s, when he drove a motor express truck on the route from Charlotte to Durham and Raleigh.

He left this position to become one of the original members of the State Highway Patrol when it was organized in 1929. He is now the head of the greatly expanded Patrol, in which only 10 of the original members remain.

where it remained until July, 1941.

Registration figures climbed to 1,171,228 in 1950 and further increases in 1951 brought the total to 1,247,824 autos, trucks and buses, an all time high.

At present there are approximately 190 employees in the Registration Division under the supervision of Miss Ingram, a career official who has been with the Department of Motor Vehicles more than 25 years.

Highway Patrol: The State Highway Patrol was created by the 1929 General Assembly through the State Highway Commission, which retained control of the troopers until 1933. At the beginning the Highway Patrol was organized around a captain, nine lieutenants (one of whom is now the present Commissioner of Motor Vehicles) and 27 patrolmen, three for each of the state's nine highway districts. Today there are only 10 members of the original patrol still on active duty.

The act creating this body decreed that it should regularly patrol the highways, enforce the motor vehicle laws and otherwise keep the highways of North Carolina safe for the motoring public and the pedestrian.

During the early years of its existence, the activities of the Patrol were limited to the enforcement of motor vehicle regulations and testing automotive equipment. However, when in 1931, the General Assembly authorized the increase of its number to 67, the duties began expanding accordingly. By legislative act of 1933, the Patrol was transferred from the Highway Commission to the Department of Revenue.

With the transfer it was given the responsibility of inspecting gasoline at bulk plants and retail outlets to insure quality. The Patrol also was charged with tracing down and collecting bad checks involved in Motor Vehicle Department transactions. During this time was increased to 121. They were relieved of the gasoline inspection duty and began a sharp enforcement of the new driver's license law, passed in 1935 by the Legislature. Two years later a statewide radio communications system was established. The system today incorporates 12 frequency modulation stations scattered geographically so as to blanket the entire state. The Patrol communications system is headed by C. D. Cavanaugh.

Still further changes in the Patrol organization were made in 1937 when the Legislature authorized the commissioning of a major as commanding officer. This action resulted in the appointment of another captain and the establishment of an additional troop. In the same year legislation was passed providing for the examination and certification of all school bus drivers by a highway patrolman.

Increased motor vehicle registration in the state necessitated further additions to the Patrol ranks. In 1939 strength had climbed to 173. And too, the world situation at that time was becoming serious. When in the fall of 1940 the National Guard was called up for active duty in the Army, another 15 troopers were added to the Patrol, bringing strength up to 188. These new men were badly needed to handle the tremendous increase in traffic brought about by the growing number of military camps and defense projects throughout the state.

Then in 1941 the General Assembly created the Department of

Motor Vehicles at which time the Highway Patrol was brought under its supervision. At the same time additional funds were appropriated for the employment of 25 more officers, bringing the total to 213.

By 1950 strength had risen to 423 under the command of former Col. James R. Smith, a career trooper, who had risen through the ranks.

The present Patrol organization of five troops is at full authorized strength (528 men) and is commanded by Col. W. B. Lentz, formerly of Carthage, who succeeded Smith August 7, 1952. Smith was recommissioned a major, making two such officers who act as executive aids to the commander. The other major is David T. Lambert.

Highway Safety Division: The Commissioner of Revenue was delegated the authority to create a division of highway safety by legislative act in 1935. By the act the commissioner was empowered to assign to this division, (1) the direction and control of the State Highway Patrol, (2) the administration of the Uniform Driver's License Law (ratified on February 28, 1935); and (3) such other duties and work, not inconsistent with the Act.

The promotion of highway safety under this act was confined primarily to enforcement of traffic regulations and the administration of the Uniform Driver's License Law. However, after the highway accident experience of 1937, when 1,123 persons were killed on the highways of the state, the division attempted to carry on a general safety promotion program throughout the state. Since no funds were appropriated for this specific work, various local and national agencies assisted the division by providing material for distribution and in some instances lending personal services.

In 1938 the Commercial Investment Trust Corporation of New York sponsored a newspaper safety institute for representatives of the newspapers in this state. The institute was held in Raleigh and was very beneficial in acquainting the press with ways and means of promoting safety through the columns of the newspaper.

The result of the increased efforts in enforcement, engineering and education are reflected in the reduction of traffic fatalities for 1938. In that year only 937 persons were killed or a reduction of about 15 per cent.

In 1939, the Legislature repealed Section 2, Chapter 324 of the Public Laws of 1935 and rewrote the entire section. The new act directed the Commissioner of Revenue to set up in his department a "division of highway safety" and to make rules and regulations governing said division and shall have the right to assign to the said division such other duties and work not inconsistent with the provisions of the Act."

The Commissioner of Revenue, as a result of this enlarged program, delegated the administration of the program to the Director of the Highway Safety Division.

In 1941 the General Assembly in creating the Department of Motor Vehicles included a Division of Registration and the Division of Highway Safety and Patrol. In compliance with this Act the administration of the Highway Safety Division was transferred from the Department of Revenue to the Department of Motor Vehicles in 1941.

Safety promotional work was carried on by four representatives of the Department during 1939, 1940, and 1941. During the summer of 1941, these representatives conducted a limited course of training for all state school bus drivers. Since then the number of representatives has increased to 27 and now conduct an expanded program of training involving more than 6,000 school bus drivers in every county of the state.

Late in 1952 a reorganization of the Highway Safety Division was completed under the direction of Commissioner Fisher. In order to achieve greater efficiency and increase safety promotional activities the Commissioner had all driver license examiners, hearing same year, a re-organization became effective which divided the state into troop areas with a lieutenant in command of each troop.

In 1935 personnel of the Patrol officers, and the unit dealing with license revocations and suspensions, transferred to the Highway Patrol.

The present director of the Highway Safety Division is H. D. Jones who has held the post since July 1, 1951. He is a former director of safety for the State Highway and Public Works Commission.

At present the Highway Safety Division is composed of two units, the Driver Improvement Section, headed by Z. E. Helms and the Accident Reporting Section, headed by James E. Civils.

The first commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles was T. Podie Ward, a building supply dealer, farmer and land holder of Wilson. Mr. Ward became commissioner by appointment of then

Governor J. Melville Broughton in 1941. He served until midsummer 1947 when Governor Cherry appointed Landon C. Rosser, an ex-Army officer and one time representative in the General Assembly. Colonel Rosser, who retained his Army rank, continued as commissioner under the Cherry administration and was re-appointed by incoming governor W. Kerr Scott in January 1949. Rosser left the post June 15, 1952 and was succeeded by the present commissioner L. R. Fisher, a native of Mecklenburg county, a

former barnstorming pilot and ex-Army officer. Fisher was formerly head of the malt beverage division of the state ABC board and has had wide experience in state government. He was at one time chief hearing officer of the Highway Safety Division and was later promoted to director of the division succeeding Jeff B. Wilson, in March, 1950. He held one of the original nine lieutenant's commissions when the Highway Patrol was organized in 1929. Later he was promoted to a captain and was for many years

active in law enforcement in western North Carolina. He resigned his post in 1943 to enter the Army, serving in England, France and Germany. He was discharged a major and returned to the Department of Motor Vehicles as chief hearing officer in 1946.

At present the Department of Motor Vehicles is housed in the annex of the Revenue building in Raleigh. Certain other divisions and units, including the entire registration Division and the License and Theft Enforcement Division, are in the Revenue Building proper. The Department employs approximately 1,200 persons including the 528 officers and men of the State Highway Patrol. It is the second largest state agency, the first being the State Highway and Public Works Commission which employs some 15,000.

School Cafeteria

JANUARY 12-16

MONDAY

Beef Tomato Stew
Tossed Green Salad
Fruited Orange Jello
Raisin Gingerbread Square
Wheat Bread, Margarine
Milk

TUESDAY

Deviled Egg Sandwich
Chicken Vegetable Soup
Red Cherry Shortcake,
Vanilla Sauce
Saltines, Margarine
Milk

WEDNESDAY

Ham-Potato Scallop
Buttered Baby Lima Beans
Turnip Greens
Corn Bread, Margarine
Orange Marmalade
Milk

THURSDAY

Steamed Wiener, Condiments
Spanish Rice
Sauerkraut
Florida Tangerine
Wiener Roll, Margarine
Milk

FRIDAY

Tomato Juice
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Wheat Bread, Margarine
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