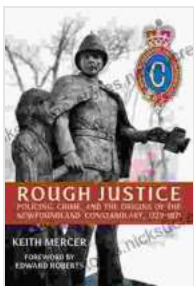


Policing Crime and the Origins of the Newfoundland Constabulary, 1729-1871

The Newfoundland Constabulary was established in 1729, making it one of the oldest police forces in North America. The Constabulary was responsible for policing crime in Newfoundland for over a century, until it was disbanded in 1871.



Rough Justice: Policing, Crime, and the Origins of the Newfoundland Constabulary, 1729–1871

by J. Randy Taraborrelli

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The origins of the Constabulary can be traced back to the early 18th century, when Newfoundland was a British colony. At that time, Newfoundland was a lawless and dangerous place. There were no laws to speak of, and crime was rampant. In 1729, the British government appointed John Bylot as the first governor of Newfoundland. Bylot was tasked with bringing law and order to the colony.

One of Bylot's first acts as governor was to establish the Newfoundland Constabulary. The Constabulary was a small force, consisting of just a few dozen men. However, they were well-armed and trained, and they quickly became a force to be reckoned with. The Constabulary's first task was to crack down on crime in St. John's, the capital city. They quickly succeeded in reducing crime rates, and they also began to establish a sense of order in the city.

The Constabulary's success in St. John's led to its expansion to other parts of Newfoundland. By the mid-18th century, the Constabulary had a presence in all of the major towns and settlements on the island. The Constabulary's duties were varied. They were responsible for enforcing the law, investigating crimes, and protecting the public. They also played a role in maintaining order during public events, such as elections and riots.

The Constabulary faced a number of challenges in the 18th and 19th centuries. One of the biggest challenges was the vast size of Newfoundland. Newfoundland is a large island, and the Constabulary had to cover a lot of ground. This made it difficult to respond to crime quickly and effectively. Another challenge was the lack of resources. The Constabulary was a small force, and it often lacked the manpower and equipment it needed to do its job effectively.

Despite these challenges, the Constabulary played a vital role in policing crime in Newfoundland. The Constabulary helped to create a safer and more orderly society, and it paved the way for the establishment of a modern police force in Newfoundland.

The Constabulary and the Law

The Newfoundland Constabulary was responsible for enforcing the law in the colony. The laws of Newfoundland were based on the laws of England. However, there were some specific laws that were unique to Newfoundland. These laws included:

- The Salmon Fishery Act (1775): This act regulated the salmon fishery in Newfoundland. It set quotas for the number of salmon that could be caught, and it prohibited the use of certain fishing gear.
- The Cod Fishery Act (1786): This act regulated the cod fishery in Newfoundland. It set quotas for the number of cod that could be caught, and it prohibited the use of certain fishing gear.
- The Liquor Control Act (1870): This act regulated the sale of alcohol in Newfoundland. It prohibited the sale of alcohol to minors, and it required all liquor stores to be licensed.

The Constabulary was also responsible for enforcing the laws of England that were in force in Newfoundland. These laws included:

- The Treason Act (1351): This act defined treason as any act that threatened the safety of the king or queen. It was a capital offense.
- The Murder Act (1752): This act defined murder as the unlawful killing of a human being with malice aforethought. It was a capital offense.
- The Theft Act (1827): This act defined theft as the unlawful taking of property with the intent to permanently deprive the owner of it. It was a felony.

The Constabulary and Crime

The Constabulary was responsible for investigating crimes in Newfoundland. The most common crimes in Newfoundland in the 18th and 19th centuries were:

- Larceny: This was the most common crime in Newfoundland. It involved the theft of property.
- Assault: This was the second most common crime in Newfoundland. It involved the unlawful attack of one person on another.
- Murder: This was a relatively rare crime in Newfoundland. It involved the unlawful killing of a human being with malice aforethought.

The Constabulary also investigated other crimes, such as arson, forgery, and counterfeiting. The Constabulary's success rate in solving crimes was relatively high. In the 1850s, the Constabulary solved over 80% of the crimes that were reported to them.

The Constabulary and the Public

The Constabulary played a vital role in maintaining order in Newfoundland. They did this by enforcing the law, investigating crimes, and protecting the public. The Constabulary also played a role in educating the public about the law. They did this by giving lectures and distributing pamphlets.

The Constabulary was generally well-respected by the public. However, there were some who criticized the Constabulary for being too harsh. In the 1860s, a group of merchants in St. John's petitioned the government to reduce the size of the Constabulary. The merchants argued that the Constabulary was too expensive, and that they were harassing innocent citizens.

The government did not reduce the size of the Constabulary. However, they did make some changes to the way that the Constabulary operated. The Constabulary was ordered to be more polite to the public, and they were prohibited from using unnecessary force.

The Disbandment of the Constabulary

The Newfoundland Constabulary was disbanded in 1871. The government decided to disband the Constabulary because they felt that it was no longer necessary. The government argued that the Constabulary was too expensive, and that they were no longer able to effectively police the colony.

The disbandment of the Constabulary was a controversial decision. Many people felt that the Constabulary was still needed to maintain order in the colony. However, the government refused to change its mind. The Constabulary was disbanded on July 1, 1871.

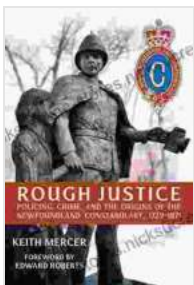
The disbandment of the Constabulary led to a sharp increase in crime in Newfoundland. The government was forced to create a new police force, the Newfoundland Police Force, in 1873. The Newfoundland Police Force is still the provincial police force of Newfoundland and Labrador today.

The Newfoundland Constabulary played a vital role in policing crime in Newfoundland in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Constabulary helped to create a safer and more orderly society, and they paved the way for the establishment of a modern police force in Newfoundland. The Constabulary's legacy is still visible today in the Newfoundland Police Force.





A newspaper article from 1867 about a murder in St. John's.



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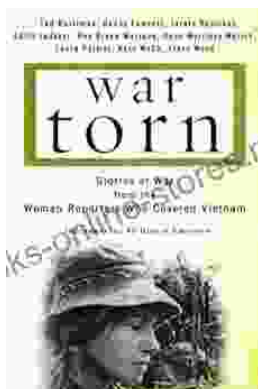
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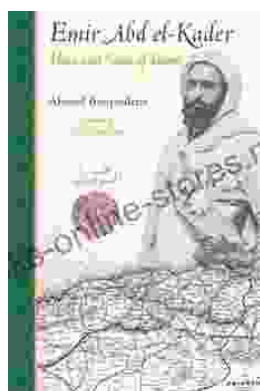
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