

## **Then & Now - Princeton News Tidbits #2**

### **April 2023**

A year ago, we shared the following; "The next time you are washing your hands & complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be. Here are some facts about the 1500s." Here are some more:

- Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof, resulting in the idiom, "It's raining cats and dogs."
- There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed, therefore, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

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### **MisChief In Princeton**

The following is the June 28, 2021 summary of an interview I did with a former Princeton resident, who prefers to stay anonymous. I can't help but wonder what the outcome might have been, if this happened today.

#### **Background information:**

In 1955, at the age of 13, this former resident convinced his Mom to bid on a 1936 Oldsmobile at a local silent auction, which she ended getting for bid of \$23. She then taught him to drive it in their 50 acres of property, and he also then taught a number of his friends to drive. To get his car started, he built a little switch box to jumpstart his car. At that time, there were no learner permits in MA, but if you were over 15, you could drive with another person with a license in the car. His parents wanted him to go to driving school so their car insurance for him would be lower, but he initially didn't do that.

At this time, Princeton had only a part-time Police Officer named Chief Joe Gendron, who lived at the foot of Gregory Hill..

## Story:

In 1959, around the 4th of July, there were a lot of fireworks being shot off in Princeton, While driving around town trying to find the culprits, the Police Chief came across the author and his friends out having fun. He accused them of shooting off fireworks, which they immediately denied doing. He continued to hassled one of his weakest friends by throwing him into the backseat of his black unmarked 4-door Ford cruiser, only to release him later that night elsewhere in town. This pissed them all off, and this author and former resident vowed to get even, somehow. [note, 1959 was Princeton Bicentennial Year of Celebrations].

That fall at the Friday night Halloween Dance at Wachusett Regional, he started telling his "buddies" that he was going to play a Halloween prank on the Police Chief by "borrowing" and hiding his cruiser. No one believed his proposed prank.

The next night, Saturday, he snuck out of his house and walked to the Police Chief's house a few miles away. He lay in the bushes across the street to see if the house seemed to be asleep. When he thought the coast was clear, he ran across the street, started to open up the garage overhead door, and the springs made such a racket, that he was sure everyone in the house would be waken, so he quickly closed the door and ran back across street to lay in wait and see what might happen. After a few more minutes,



*Chiefs Car Was The Same Vintage - This Not The Actual Car*

seeing no activity in the house he tried again. This time he got the garage door up halfway, before the spring noise caused him to close the door quickly, and run back across the street to wait a little longer. After waiting twice as long this time, he decided to give it one last try. He ran across the street, heaved the door all the way up, jumped into the car, used his home made switch box to jumpstart the car, and drove it off. He headed down Rt. 31 toward Sterling and turned left onto Bullard Road. About a mile down that road, on the right, there was a split rail fence leading to a field that couldn't be seen from the road. He removed the rails, and drove the cruiser into the field and parked it. Then as he walked out heading home, he put the rails back in position and covered his tire tracks in the dirt.

The next day it was in all the Sunday papers, "Princeton Police Chief's car stolen out of his own garage at night". That night, he again crept out of his house, walked to where the cruiser had been hidden, opened the gate, and this time drove the car to Bullock Lane and parked it next to the tennis court so it could be found the next day. He knew the people living in the house had left for the winter so he wasn't afraid of being seen. The next day at school, his buddies were all patting him on the back, until the police arrived and arrested him.

He thinks that one of his "buddies" must have turned him in, but he never found out for sure. He was charged with "unlawful use of a vehicle", because he didn't have a license. The court took away his right to drive, and he was put on probation for two years, where he had to report in to his probation officer every couple weeks. Because he had no further mischievous activities, (he said with a wink), he was given back his right to drive and got his license after attending driving school, just before his high school graduation.

I asked him, if he was sorry that he had done it, and he said, "No, because the Chief was a bully and being a hard ass to all the teenage kids in town. It always seemed like the Chief liked to pick on the weakest kids."

This former resident went on to become a lawyer, and he still bumps into people who remind him of his past prank – "just like it had happened the yesterday".

*Transcribed By William "Bud" Brooks in 2021*

***After reading this, if you have any other interesting or humorous stories about life growing up in Princeton, please send them to [princetonmahistory@gmail.com](mailto:princetonmahistory@gmail.com).***