

RADAR - LIDAR TRAINING FIREARMS TRAINING

Understanding Police Traffic RADAR & LIDAR

Antique Police & Fire Call Boxes



Police call boxes were installed in large cities beginning in the 1880s and continuing until the 1960s. They were used by officers that “walked a beat.” Officers were required to “pull a box” every hour to confirm they were on patrol, to report crimes, to request a “paddy wagon” for the transportation of prisoners and to receive information from dispatch. With the invention of two-way radios and most recently cell phones, police call boxes have become a thing of the past. Police call boxes utilized two technologies: telegraph and telephone.

Boston Police Department was the 5th agency in the United States to implement police call boxes. The 1887 Boston call box below contains a Blake transmitter and a long pole receiver. This technology was replaced during the mid-1890's with more efficient transmitters and receivers. This call box included a series of cogs and wheels that allowed an officer to transmitter 5 different Morris Code signals to headquarters including: telephone, ambulance, “paddy wagon”, beat report, end of duty report. This cast iron call box weights nearly 200 pounds.

Gamewell was the largest producer of police and fire call boxes. By 1890, Gamewell controlled 90% of the market. Appearing in 1890 the Gamewall “Wagon Call” box allowed an officer to insert a key into the wagon slot and turn the key without opening the door. A signal was sent to headquarters identifying the box and that the door was closed. In other words, just send a “paddy wagon” to that location. With a larger key the front door could be opened and the same lever was activated by hand. Again a signal was sent and headquarters knew the box number and that the door was open. In other words, the officer wants to talk on the telephone.

Another Gamewell invention was the “Citizen Key” police call box. Prominent citizens in the community were entrusted with a key. This citizen could then insert their assigned key in a hole located in the center of the door. Turning the key to the right would summons the police. The key was then trapped in the door and a police officer would have to open the door to retrieve the numbered key and return it to the citizen. This procedure was to prevent false reports and to identify the citizen that had placed the call.

Once the door of the “Citizen Key” call box was opened an officer had seven options including: F Wagon, S Wagon, Ambulance, Telephone and Reports 1, 2 & 3. F Wagon was for “fast” meaning emergency, send the “paddy wagon” as soon as possible. S Wagon was for “slow” meaning no big hurry. Reports 1, 2 & 3 represented an officers duty reports. Report 1 was for “I am at my assigned post and am beginning my shift.” Report 2 was “on duty everything is all right.” Report 2 may be pulled at various intervals throughout the officer's shift. Report 3 was “I have completing my shift and will be returning to headquarters shortly.”

Early police and fire call boxes were made of cast iron and were extremely heavy, many weighting well over 120 pounds not including the cast iron stand. The 1900 combination police and fire harp below weighs in at 350 pounds. Beginning in the mid-1920s the call boxes were made of cast aluminum. This reduced corrosion due to inclement weather.

Beginning in 1927 the Harrington Seaburg Corporation began producing police and fire call boxes. They sold out to Gamewell in 1929, just days before the "Wall Street Crash of 1929."

The 1930 police call box listed below contains a "state of the art" Western Electric "space saver" telephone with a dial. This phone first appeared in 1929. Now an officer could dial out and receive calls. Received calls rang the two brass bells.

The 1938 Washington D. C. call box below also contained a dial telephone and therefore eliminated the telegraph portion of the box. The name on the door reflects this change simply stating "police telephone." A large blue light on top would provide a visual alert for an incoming call.

Fire call boxes operated on the same principle as police call boxes. The only difference is when activated a fire call box would sound an alarm at the fire station and a ticker tape would print a Morris Code of the box number that was activated. The fire call box would repeat the code several times. (Note the fire call box ticker tape below.) When a police call box was activated a Morris Code signal was received by a dispatcher noting the call box number. Dispatch would then have the option of logging the call, in the event the officer was simply "pulling a box" to report all is well or the dispatch could call the box via telephone, when an officer requested further communications.

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1887 Boston Police



1887 Boston Police
with long pole receiver



1887 Boston Police
with Blake transmitter



1888 Excalibur



1888 Excalibur



1888 Excalibur

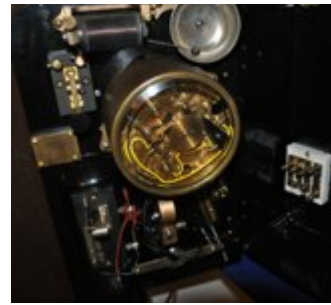




1900 Gamewell
Seattle Police Dept



1900 Seattle Police
with OST receiver



1900 Gamewell Seattle



1900 Police Harp
box # 24



1900 Police Harp
with OST receiver



1900 Police Harp



1900 Fire Harp
box # 24



1900 Fire Harp



1900 Fire Harp



1905 Gamewell
Fire Call Box



1905 Gamewell
Fire Call Box



1905 Gamewell
Fire Call Box





1912 Washington DC



1914 Auxiliary Police



1914 Auxiliary Police



1914 Gamewell Fire



1914 Gamewell Fire



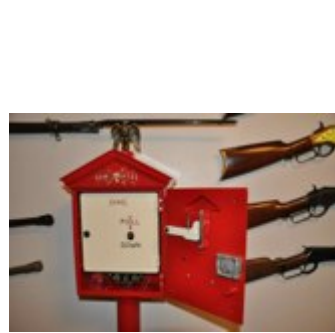
1915 Gamewell



1915 Gamewell



1924 Gamewell
Fire Call Box



1924 Gamewell
Fire Call Box



1924 Gamewell
Fire Call Box



1928 Harrington Seaburg



1928 Harrington Seaburg



1928 Harrington Seaburg



1930 Police Call Box



1930 Police Call Box





1930 Police Call Box



1930 Police Call Box
with rotary dial



1935 Gamewell
with signal light



1935 Gamewell



1938 Washington DC



1938 Washington DC
with rotary dial



1938 Washington DC
with blue alarm light



1929 FDNY



1929 FDNY



1929 FDNY



1929 FDNY



Fire Call Box Ticker Tape



Police Call Boxes & Cuffs



Police Citizen Key



Police Citizen Key



Police Citizen Key



Police Wagon Call



Police Wagon Call
box # 31



Police Wagon Call



Police Wagon Call



Police Wagon Call
signal wheel #31



Police Wagon Call



Emergency Call Box



Emergency Call Box

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