

# Ask the Hill Historian

## The 1-D-1 Substation

By **Nina Tristani** - January 8, 2019



*The 1-D-1 Station. Photo: Jason Yen*

On August 6, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law the Washington, DC police department. While DC had a police force at the time, one that dated back to 1803, it was too small for the then current population. The new law would instate a more organized and expanded force.

In setting up the force, the city was divided into eight precincts. The current Subdivision of 1-D-1 was originally the eighth precinct. In 1886, there was a reorganization of the police department, and the eighth was renumbered fifth now the oldest of the eight precinct houses in Washington.

In early December of 1902, work began on a new station-house for the fifth precinct. Since the old building was being torn down, the fifth precinct moved to 243 10th Street, SE, as a temporary measure.

The new precinct house had its most infamous moment just a few years after it opened. In 1909, on the day after William Howard Taft was inaugurated as President, John W. Collier, a police officer in the fifth precinct, shot his superior officer, Captain William H. Mathews. Collier had attempted to call in sick earlier that afternoon, and Mathews had demanded the officer report to the station to prove how sick he was. Shortly after Collier arrived, his fellow officers heard a single shot from Mathews' office, and upon entering, saw that their Captain was dead.

During Collier's trial, the defendant claimed self-defense in that Mathews had reached into his pocket and thus Collier had felt the need to defend himself in a lethal way. The trial ended with a verdict of manslaughter and Collier was sentenced to 15 years in jail. Rumors persist that the ghost of Captain Mathews is seen from time-to-time at the precinct.

The fifth precinct returned to its job of keeping the peace on the Hill. Less than a year after the shooting of Captain Mathews, it was declared the "model station house of the city."

In order to combat the new criminals, the city applied new technologies and the precinct system that had been developed for use by policemen walking a beat, and using their whistles to request aid, was no longer relevant. Thus in 1967, a major reorganization of the police force was proposed. Chiefly among the changes proposed was the reduction of the total number of precincts, of which DC had more per square mile than any other large city in the United States.

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