

August 2005

THE BIRTH OF THE MSPTA

Written by Paul Thibodeau, Retired Sergeant
And Barbara Kelly, wife of Howard Kelly, the true father of the MSPTA.

Through the years there have been many stories as to how the MSPTA was started. In fact one person claimed credit as being one of the original persons to have originated the MSPTA, and claimed this on his resume while running for political office. My understanding is that there have been other discussions amongst retired persons as to how it first originated. I would like to set the record straight as to just what took place from the beginning.

The MSPTA was first talked about by the Troopers of the Newaygo Post, and in fact by ONE Trooper from the Newaygo Post, and that Trooper was HOWARD KELLY.

I would first like to list the personal that was at the Post in 1962. I will attempt to list same by seniority, which my memory may be a little cloudy after forty three years. At any rate they were as follows.

Robert Halladay, Sergeant, Post Commander. Everett Ferguson, Corporal. With the following Troopers. Charles Johnson, John Egan, Ronald Fritz, John Houchlie, Paul Thibodeau, Howard Kelly, Melvin Koenes, Andrew Salkovich, and Wayne Long.

If you look at the above list you will find that all are deceased with the exception of Howard Kelly and myself that I know of. I do not know about Wayne Long.

It all started while everyone was attending Post Meeting in early summer of 1962. All members of the Post were present along with the District Commander Capt. Leroy Hunt. At one point during the meeting Howard asked the Captain to check on something in Lansing. (I cannot recall just what information Howard was asking for). At any rate the Captain told Howard to check for himself as he gets to Lansing often. (NOTE: Howard was fondly referred to as Pipeline Kelly, as his father, Francis P. Kelly was Deputy Director of Personnel with the Michigan Civil Service.) With that statement from Captain Hunt, Howard then said, "I take it that I have your permission to contact Commissioner Childs." The Captain said he did. (I always felt that Capt. Was pretty hard pressed to say yes, after his comment that Howard got to Lansing often.)

After that Post Meeting, Howard along with most of the other Troopers met at Howard's house. At this time Howard covered topics of concern to all that he wanted to talk with the Commissioner about. At that point in time, officers had no voice whatsoever. In fact there also was no unity between Districts. As an example all officers were working six days a week and nine hours a day. Unless you were in the 3rd District where they worked 10 hour days. One of the topics was the possibility of forming an association where topics of concern of the rank and file could be presented and then in turn talked over with the administration. We were all in agreement that we needed a united voice to present our concerns to the command and as to what Howard was to present to Commissioner Childs.

After this meeting Howard then made the appointment to meet with Commissioner Joseph Childs. As a footnote to this meeting, it has been reported that Howard stopped by the Post and advised that he was on his way to Lansing, and with that the Post Commander then called District and advised them of same. I have no knowledge if this incident actually took place, however I will say that is was common knowledge when Howard was going to Lansing and that the appointment had been made.

I would like to point out that in regards to the five day week. The MSPTA had no part, nor was it a topic of discussion at the time the Commissioner was contacted. This was a court action that was started by Trooper Charles Webber, some time earlier, to which most officers contributed monetarily to bring this case to positive conclusion. I say "most officers" for we did have some slackers that did not contribute to this endeavor.

Upon Howard's return from his meeting with Commissioner Childs, we had another meeting at which time all were brought up to date. Some of the comments as reported to us by Howard. The Commissioner was not surprised by this meeting and in fact was surprised it had not occurred earlier. Also Commissioner advised that there would be no reprisals for the actions taken by the officers of the Newaygo Post. The Commissioner also stated he wanted to look into the matter further and after some discussion with the administration would get back with us.

It was then decided by all of us that after having, what we considered success up to this point. That further action should be taken by us. We did have a concern to officially take some action as a group, which could possibly undermine what was already accomplished. With this in mind, it was decided that we would apprise the rest of the Department of what took place by personal letters to individual Troopers at other Posts. By this action the Department would have a hard time to take any disciplinary action against us as we were writing personal letters. Thus the remainder of the Department was advised of what had taken place, which started talk both pro and con throughout the Department. At any rate the message was out.

In 1963 the Department unwittingly assisted in the forming of the MSPTA by Transfers from the Newaygo Post. In early summer of 1963 Trooper Howard Kelly was transferred to Pontiac Post. Trooper John Houchlie was transferred to the Alpena Post and Trooper Andrew Salkovich was transferred to the Center Line Post. I might add however that these officers had submitted requests for transfers.

In the fall of 1963 the following transfers took place. Trooper Charles Johnson was transferred to the Flint Post, Trooper Melvin Kones was transferred to the South Haven Post, and Trooper Paul Thibodeau transferred to the East Lansing Post. We now had six strong voices all over the State as apposed to having them in one place. This action solidified the need of an association to represent the rank and file of the Department.

With the displacement of the Troopers from the Newaygo Post, the continuing work of the true Father of the MSPTA, Howard Kelly, and his wife Barbara, brought about the final association, as we know of it today. I feel it must be noted of the great contribution that was given by Howard's wife Barbara. She was the secretary the letter writer, the continuing helper in the forming of the MSPTA. The correspondence alone that was required to form the association is unbelievable. This being accomplished while raising seven children. To this, every member of the Association owes her a great thank you for a job well done.

It is with great sadness that I have to report that Howard is presently suffering from Alzheimer's and is not able to contribute to this article, thus the comments from his wife Barbara, which was written last year.

This writing was started by myself while on vacation in the northern part of the State in early August. Howard passed away on August 15th, with memorial mass at Holly Cross Catholic Church August 18, 2005. It was with great honor and privilege to be asked by the family to escort the body from the service to the hearse along side of Trooper David McKee of the Lansing Post, who was assigned to the funeral. I was able to give a final salute to my good friend, and was able to represent all retired members of the Department.
Thank you for letting me write a little history of the MSPTA

Paul E. Thibodeau, Retired Sergeant

The following was written by Barbara Kelly, wife of Howard Kelly the true father of the MSPTA. This was written about a year or so ago to Trooper Bradley.

Mrs. Howard Kelly
906-D Montevideo Drive
Lansing, MI 48917-3989
September 29, 2004

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Dear Trooper Bradley,

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To paraphrase Charles Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the Worst of times". Such were the conditions that the Troopers experienced Prior to the birth of the Michigan State Police Troopers Association.

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At that time assignments such as "sleeping in the hole" were Commonplace. Sleeping in the hole meant that one Trooper, was Designated daily to spend the entire night as the sole person Responsible for the Post, a Post whose doors were supposedly locked at Midnight. Of course locked doors did not deter the occasional tourist Who ran out of gas or the local pub couples looking for a counselor in the form of a Trooper, from demanding admission to enter those doors.

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Also to add to the Troopers night's rest were the many phone calls received from citizens either seeking aide from the sole night patrol or checking such things as weather conditions. Often times, come morning, the Trooper would then begin his own patrol duties on the seven to three Day shift.

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Did "Sleeping in the Hole" mean overtime pay? Overtime pay was Non-existent prior to the formation of the MSPTA. Reports were written, after the end of a shift and janitorial duties such as lawn planting and Patrol car washing were assigned randomly and at the discretion of the Post Commander. Hours spent in the court were not credited as work hours. Transfers were frequent and mostly at a financial loss to the Trooper. Cancelled pass days were simply cancelled with no compensation or replacement.

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Questioning the wisdom of wearing your jacket, the very same one that you wore to keep warm in the winter, in the sweltering heat of a hot Summer days was not even an approachable subject.

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"Overworked and Underpaid" could have been our theme song. After listening, for years, to ourselves complain. A mighty group of six Troopers at the now infamous Newaygo Post, took it upon themselves to form an Association that would represent the interests and well being of the Troopers.

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Free hours were spent planning and sending out letters seeking to find the interest that Troopers state wide might have in finding a voice for themselves.

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Discovering that many of our fellow Troopers shared the same sentiments and wanted to have them heard in the form of a united voice, I took one of the longest rides of my life and headed to East Lansing to meet with Commissioner Joseph Childs.

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Because of their dedication and loyalty to the Michigan State Police, yet wanting representation, the Troopers believed that the answer should

come from within their ranks rather than from an outside source.

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With the realization by the Commissioner that the Troopers had no interest in joining a union, the door to communication opened and the nod was given to formation of the Association. Cheers were not heard but at least we had a nod, if only slight.

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Upon my return home, I related to my fellow Troops in Newaygo that although we had a green light, it just might blink off and on, now and then.

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Threats made previously, were now faint echoes in the din of the united voice of the Troopers as they joined hands to form an Association that still stands proud and strong today.

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Transfers were forthcoming and many of the original Newaygo six were moved about the state. Still the work continued, thanks to help of the Association's first investment, a twenty five dollar mimeograph machine that was hand cranked.

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Letters were mailed, phone calls made and meetings were held, until an Association with goals and by laws was ready for presentation. At long last, the Michigan State Police Troopers Association was formed.

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Officers were elected and the First Michigan State Police Troopers Association Banquet was held with President Howard Kelly presiding. The Guest list included state notables such as Governor George Romney, Franklin DeWald, Director of Civil Service, Francis P. Kelly Deputy Director of Personnel, Civil Service. Captain William Ward, Michigan State Police, Honorable John Fitzgerald, State Senator, Honorable Thomas Kavanaugh, Chief Justice, Howard Rugg, Editor for the Lansing State Journal and Reverend Francis Martin, Michigan State Police Chaplain..

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As the Michigan State Police Troopers Association celebrates forty years of success may the names of those that sacrificed for its birth be remembered.

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The list is long but each had a part and a tale to tell, Troopers such as the Newaygo fathers, Paul Thibodeau, John Houchlie, Andrew Salkovich, Melvin Koenes, Charles Johnson and Howard Kelly. Also included in that list are the members of the first board and the District representatives, Stan Snyder Vice President, Francis (Skip) Davis Treasurer, Donald Pederson Treasurer, Floyd Voltz. Charles Weber, Alex Fisher, Ralph Kartheau. Wilbur Bond, James Echols and Harold Karnitz as well as those command officers who each in their own helped to make it just a little easier for a trooper to do his part in the birth of the Association.

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Each is part of the foundation of the MSPTA that you know today.

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The friendships formed during those years have lasted over the years as has the memory of those young Troopers, mostly now deceased, willing to sacrifice their own careers to help make the careers of those following them more respected for the services given.

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Thank you for having allowed me to share a bit of your past history with you.

Respectfully Submitted

Barbara Kelly