

H. R. LEARY, 82, A COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, DIES

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Howard R. Leary, the Police Commissioner of New York City from 1966 to 1970, a turbulent period marked by the exposure of corruption within the department and social strife in the city, died on Monday at the Buckingham Valley Nursing Center in Buckingham, Pa. Mr. Leary, who lived in Solebury Township, Pa., was 82.

The cause was congestive heart failure, said his wife, Jennie.

Mr. Leary was a native of Pennsylvania. He was brought to New York and named Police Commissioner by John V. Lindsay shortly after he became Mayor. Four years later Mr. Leary resigned. The Police Department was then engulfed in a swirl of accusations that affected City Hall and Mr. Lindsay's national political aspirations.

In addition, a commission headed by Whitman Knapp had been formed to conduct an investigation into charges that the department was riddled with bribe-taking and other corruption. Some civic leaders questioned Mr. Leary's ability to correct the situation.

A year after he resigned, the Knapp Commission reported that both Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Leary bore some responsibility for failing to act promptly against corruption. Morale Problems

During his tenure, Mr. Leary was caught in a barrage of problems that included a strained relationship with City Hall, declining morale within the department and deepening divisions among the city's residents.

He had to deal with demands for the creation of a civilian-controlled review board, scandals within the narcotics bureau, violence between police officers and Columbia University students, attacks on groups protesting the Vietnam War, the bombing of synagogues and the perception of many police officers that they were unfairly criticized for performing their duties.

Mr. Leary was widely praised for making innovations in the department. He established the 911 police emergency number and set up a computerized dispatch system. He also worked to increase the size of the force and to recruit more black and Puerto Rican officers.

Mr. Leary never gave any reasons for his resignation at the time or later. He refused to provide City Hall with a formal letter of resignation. His wife said yesterday that he had never discussed the matter with her or alluded to it.

After leaving the department Mr. Leary became, briefly, an executive of the Abraham & Straus store and then of Holmes Protection. In 1972 he became a professor of criminal justice at Trenton State College, retiring in 1982.

Mr. Leary's career in law enforcement started when he became a foot patrolman with the Philadelphia Police Department in 1940. He worked his way up, putting himself through law school at night in the process. He was finally named commissioner in 1963 and served for three years, then left Pennsylvania for New York.

Mr. Leary is survived by his wife of 52 years.

Source:

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