

Crime Stoppers



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This is an interesting, rather off-the-wall, topic. It was first brought to my attention by the late Bill Thomas of Florida as an offshoot of his larger “Anti-” collection. Once he brought the subject up, I seemed to note these Crime-Stopping covers more often.

Covers in this category, as you can see from those examples shown here, include those from local neighborhood watch groups, organizations that fund witness programs, and local police departments. Depending on your personal proclivities, you may or may not believe the latter type actually belong in this category, but many police department covers include some type of crime-stopping information, so they actually would fall into this category. Of course, since police are professional crime-stoppers, you don’t really have to stretch the imagination very far at all to include all police department covers here. And, without meaning to cast any aspersions on any of these Crime-Stopping groups (the civilian ones), I would think that a very good argument could be made for seeing them as descendents of the earlier vigilantes.

Actually, these early crime-stopping groups didn’t have anything to do with crime. The word “vigilantes” comes from the Latin word “vigiles,” which was the name for the people hired to walk around Ancient Rome and look for fires. They were actually Rome’s first fire department. In any event, from that humble beginning, we go to the “vigilantes” that we’re familiar with—armed citizens settling their own problems by taking the law into their own hands. And that’s where we get the negative image, from their taking the law into their own hands. But that’s really a revisionist view, and, even though revising history is the politically correct thing to do these days, it definitely skews the picture. Vigilante groups, when the country was young and sparsely populated, and law enforcement officers were few and far between, were necessary. In those days, people simply couldn’t afford to wait for some far off government to respond to local emergencies. Even as I sit here writing this article, a few miles from here is a Sierra foothill town called Placerville. It was originally named “Hangtown.” Justice was swift, and justice was sure.

Well, the country changed, and times changed, and such vigilante groups eventually were replaced by local police departments, etc. Today’s civilian anti-crime groups have the same basic goals as the earlier vigilante groups, with the difference that they work *within* the law, and they’re actually encouraged by local police, simply because the police can’t be everywhere, and they need all the eyes and ears they can get. Many police departments, for example, will actually come out to neighborhood meetings and instruct residents on how to set up neighborhood watch groups and so forth.

I have no stats on this small category, but I have 13 different on hand at the moment.

