Cincinnati Police Canine Handsome

The Greater Cincinnati Police Museum

“Preserving the History of Law Enforcement in the Greater Cincinnati Area”



Handsome – “THE POLICEMAN’S PAL”

I first met handsome in my early years with the Cincinnati Police Department. Handsome was moved around from the Fraternal Order of Police to the Cincinnati Park Department and finally to The Greater Cincinnati Police Museum (The Greater Cincinnati

Police Historical Society). During his travels he also stopped at the Cincinnati Public Library for Police Week.

The legend of Hansome is more than a legend it is history. This history has been passed down in the family of Handsome's partner, Officer James O'Neil.

Upon arrival at the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum "Handsome" was placed in the area where visitors would view "Handsome" in real life. Enclosed in a protective housing "Handsome" watches all of the visitor's to the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum. o the right of his house there is a photo of Officer James O'Neil and another unknown police officer.

Handsome was as Handsome did, and what Handsome did is police history. Handsome was one of the best "policemen" Cincinnati ever had. He was only a dog, but his life was with the police. The complete biography of Handsome would make a book in itself. No officer in the history of the police department could perform his duties as simply as did Handsome. He made no reports; he prosecuted no cases, was never called on the carpet, never received any reprimands and never needed a uniform. He served in the second district out of the old Hammond street station, and later in the Broadway police station (District Two) for the full fourteen years of his life. During this time, he patrolled one of the toughest beats in the city, known as "rat row" along the Ohio River bank in the Cincinnati "bottoms". The average length of service for patrolmen is about 12 years, so it can be seen why Handsome endeared himself to the members of the department.

It was on a bitter cold winter night long ago when patrolman James O'Neill was patrolling the riverfront beat, that Handsome first came to the attention of police. Patrolman O'Neill, better known as "Big Jim," heard a pitiful, pleading sound like a small

baby whimpering. He followed the sound and there in a doorway, seeking shelter from the bitterness of the night, the patrolman found what looked like a little bundle of fur. It was Handsome!!! “Big Jim” picked up the shivering, abandoned puppy. He was only a few weeks old then. “Big Jim” took him into a warm place and fed him. From that time on, “Big Jim” and Handsome were friends, real friends.

The pup and the policeman became inseparable, and as the warmer days came, Handsome grew big and strong. Early on, he became known and recognized as the great “policeman” he was. He would eat only when fed by a policeman in uniform, or by “Mother Morgan,” who ran a restaurant on Broadway near the river. He slept only when the officers changed reliefs at roll call or when the officers with whom he was working went into the “hole”.

Handsome assisted in hundreds of arrests. He plodded along several feet in front of policemen, with his head to the ground. On and on he plodded, hour after hour, day and night, year in and year out. He worked unceasingly.

Detective Captain Patrick Hayes told a story of Handsome with whom he was working as a rookie patrolman. Hayes related that he and his brother officer were patrolling the “river beat” one night, when they noticed a man hurrying along in the shadows. Hayes became suspicious
of the man, who was across the street and some distance from them. He told Handsome to “get him”. The dog raced after the fugitive, who had begun to run. Soon, they were out of sight down in the “bottoms”. Hayes and his partner then heard Handsome barking on the river bank. They hurried down the hill, and there they found Handsome. The man was completely disrobed. The dog was standing over the prostrate thief, baring those long fangs and growling at the man’s throat. Jewelry and watches were scattered all over the pavement. Handsome had caught another

burglar! The prisoner confessed that he had broken a jewelry store window “uptown” and removed the window’s contents.

On another occasion, a murderer slipped through a police net. He had fled to the dives on the riverfront. The police squads closed in. Handsome did not like these outside police. They had no business on his beat, he thought. For a few minutes, Handsome left the strange police officers and went off by himself. It was not long until his partners heard the faint sound of Handsome’s barking. They left the other officers and traced the barking sounds. Handsome was located in a dark hole under the main deck of a steamboat. He had his man at bay. The murderer pleaded with the officers to call off the dog.

Then, one day, Handsome fell ill. He tried to go on, but he just could not. The best veterinarians in the city were called, but they could do nothing to help the dog. Their best efforts were in vain. Handsome was beyond aid. He died on his beat!!!

This “Tale of Handsome” was originally written in the early 20th Century, when Handsome passed away and was memorialized in this case. Handsome’s friend, Patrolman Jim O’Neill, was killed on duty in 1915, just a few years after Handsome attended his final roll call.

Handsome has been the subject of several newspaper articles. Shown below are some examples.

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OPINIONS

OTHER POINTS OF VIEW

Today's opinion maker

New police museum has shaggy dog story

Peter Bronson

How you can help



This photo was taken during the police week exhibit at the Cincinnati Public Library. Cincinnati Police Auto Squad Detective John Taylor was the guest speaker. Handsome is to the right of Detective Taylor.

cheetahs, exotic birds and other North African animals needed for the June production during an unusual casting call at the Cincinnati Zoo Thursday

1981

Library Display Recalls Police Heyday

BY J. FRAZIER SMITH
Enquirer Reporter

There's an 80-year-old dog named Handsome at the main branch of the Cincinnati Public Library on Vine Street. He's fluffy white with black eyes waiting to capture the attention of visitors who venture his way.

Handsome, a "well-preserved police mascot of bygone days, is part of the exhibit provided by the Cincinnati Police Division for National Police Officer Memorial Week.

He stands guard at the exhibits in the third floor room of the library, watching over the memorabilia that will reside there for the next three weeks.

Handsome, called a "policeman" by his friends in his days on the force, was a pup when found by police officer Jim O'Neill along the "rat row" area of the riverfront on a cold winter night long ago. The dog was once credited with capturing a robber by nearly disrobing the suspect and knocking him to the ground near the "bottoms" area of town.

HANDSOME WAS a particular dog who many times would not eat unless fed by a policeman or by Mother Moerge's restaurant.

He served a total of 18 years for the second district at the Old Hammond station and later at Broadway station. He later fell ill and, despite the services of the best veterinarians, died on his beat.

Other exhibits include police badges from around the world.

Awards Ceremony Will Follow Service

National Police Officer Memorial Week will climax today with a memorial service at 1 p.m. at the Plum Street side of Cincinnati City Hall.

Following the ceremonies, officers will go to District 1 headquarters, 310 Ezzard Charles Dr., for Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) memorial ceremonies.

The City Chamber of Commerce will present Police Achievement Awards, with Chief Myron J. Leister presenting the division personal sacrifice medal to those officers wounded while on duty.

The 1980 award, a red ribbon trimmed in gold, will be presented to police Officer Marvin Johnson, now assigned to the vice control bureau.

called by Sgt. Pat Clive). Badges from Canada, Hong Kong, Britain, Salisbury and cities across the United States are on display.

The exhibit, prepared by the Community Assistance Section and the Youth Aid Section of the city police division, also has law enforcement equipment dating back to the turn of the century. A metal, wrench-like device called the Bertillion Identification method, dating back to 1882 – is a predecessor to fingerprinting. Arms, legs, jaws and noses were measured with this device.

PHOTOS OF police bands, group photos from years ago, and a picture of the 1923 Cincinnati police force, entitled "Guardians of Life and Limb on Cincinnati Streets," are there.

Documents from 1906 tell how Col. William Copelin was "Making Cincinnati the most uncomfortable city in the country for evil-doers."

The force also had the distinction of being regarded as a model of a well-managed police force in 1967, and a *Life* magazine cover proves it.

In addition, a memorial recalls those officers who met violent or accidental death while in the line of duty.