John A. Goodson – Covington, Kentucky's First Police Chief

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Covington, Kentucky's First Police Chief

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John A. Goodson was born on June 15, 1847 in Covington, the son of Major John A. Goodson Sr. (1791-1867) and Ester "Hetty" Wasson Goodson (1809-1862). He grew up in a family deeply rooted

in public service and civic leadership. In 1888, he married Minnie Mollitor, and together they raised two sons, John J. Goodson and Logan L. Goodson, continuing a family line that would remain intertwined with Covington's civic life for generations.

Goodson's early years were marked by personal loss. His mother died in 1862 when he was just 15 and five years later, in 1867, he lost his father, who committed suicide.

Goodson entered adulthood without the guidance of either parent, yet he carried forward the legacy of public duty established by his father. Major Goodson, a veteran of the War of 1812, had been a prominent figure in Kentucky politics, serving in the Kentucky House of Representatives and holding the office of Mayor of Covington from 1860 to 1864.

These early experiences, both the example of his father's public service and the hardships of early loss, helped forge Goodson's own path into civic life. In the decades that followed, he would emerge as a significant figure in Covington's law enforcement history, carrying forward the Goodson family's longstanding commitment to public service.

In 1870, Goodson was residing in Covington in the household of his brother-in-law, John G. Carlisle, who had just been reelected to the Kentucky Senate. Carlisle would go on to become one of Kentucky's most influential political figures, later serving as Lieutenant Governor, U.S. Representative, U.S. Senator, and ultimately U.S. Secretary of the Treasury.
Goodson soon entered public life himself. His first elected role was as Captain of Covington Fire Company No. 3, a position that marked his introduction to civic leadership. By 1880, he had been elected City Marshal of Covington. His margin of victory was so substantial that it elevated him to a position of

prominence within local politics, effectively making him a leading figure in Covington’s Democratic Party.

As City Marshal, Goodson began shaping Covington’s emerging law enforcement services by appointing trusted associates to key positions, laying the groundwork for a more structured and disciplined force. Under his leadership, the department earned a reputation, even in larger metropolitan cities, for its firm approach to enforcing law.

In 1883, the Covington City Commissioners appointed Goodson as Chief of Police, marking a significant step in the city’s transition toward a fully paid, professional police force. His tenure continued until 1895, when newly elected Mayor Joseph L. Rhinock initiated sweeping changes within the department, replacing Goodson with his political ally Joseph Pugh. Goodson thus occupies a unique place in Covington’s law enforcement history as both the last City M

arshal and the first Chief of Police of the city’s modern, professionalized police department.
Goodson’s health began to decline in March 1909, and he suffered a mild stroke. He died at his residence on February 7, 1910. Many believed that his failing health was hastened by the death of his son, John J. Goodson Jr., a brakeman for the C., C. & L. Railroad killed in a train accident in December 1909.

John A. Goodson is buried in Linden Grove Cemetery, interred without a marker in the

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