

Marshal John T. Thompson | City of Covington



Age: 38

Served: 2 years

January 1, 1867 to February 27, 1869

OFFICER

John was born during 1832 in Virginia. His mother, Sarah Thompson, had several children in Virginia before moving to Kentucky and his father's name is currently lost to us. John worked as a tobacconist during 1863 when he signed up for the Civil War draft. We have no account of his service, but after the war, during 1866, he worked for Carey and T., lived on Bakewell between 6th and 7th, and was involved in Democratic politics.

During April 1866, at the Kenton County Democratic Convention, John was nominated to run for Marshal of Covington. He was elected and began his term on January 1, 1867. Marshal Thompson was re-elected in 1867. During 1868, he successfully ran again, resting his campaign on quiet and solitude of the city since he

took over as Marshal.

On April 24, 1867, he married a divorcée, Eliza (Kearney) Holden. By 1869, they were living at 77 E. 3rd Street. Though it is doubtful that he knew it, by February 1869 she was pregnant with his first and only child.

INCIDENT

On February 5, 1869 about 6:30 p.m., Florence resident John Bentley was on his way home with a load of groceries in his wagon. He was stopped by three highwaymen, about one hundred yards above Louisburg, and robbed of his money and silver watch. Two brothers, Bernard and Henry Dressman, came upon the scene and chased the robbers all the way to Covington where they found and informed Marshal Thompson.

To head them off, Marshal Thompson responded to the Covington and Cincinnati (Suspension) Bridge and found three men who matched the descriptions exactly. Two had already paid their toll and were crossing the bridge. Marshal Thompson arrested the third while he was transacting his toll.

As they quietly walked from the bridge, the prisoner suddenly pulled a pistol and shot Marshal Thompson in the abdomen and ran.

Citizens carried Marshal Thompson to his home across from City Hall. Doctors Kearns and Quirner responded. They found that the bullet had entered his abdomen, but were unable to find the ball, which they believed came to rest near the spinal cord. He spent the night quietly, but they considered his condition very critical. On February 7, his doctors observed that he would probably not survive.

By February 8, Marshal Thompson's condition had improved substantially. By the 10th, his physicians were confident of a recovery.

DEATH

However, he deteriorated through the month. On February 17 he made out his last will and testament. On February 28, 1869 he died at 3:21 p.m. His autopsy showed that the bullet caused pressure to the spinal cord which eventually, and inevitably, caused his death. He was the first Covington law enforcement officer to die in the line of duty.

Marshal Thompson was survived by his wife, Eliza Thompson; mother, Sarah Thompson; and siblings, Priscilla Thompson, Axcey (John) Wilson, and Isabella (John) Dailey. His Funeral Mass was celebrated by Father Verdin on March 2, 1869 at the Cathedral on 8th Street. The procession through the streets was one of the largest ever witnessed in Covington. It was composed of citizens on foot and in carriages, the Catholic Benevolent Society, policemen, firemen, City Council, and nearly every officer in the Covington government. He was buried in Section 1 of Saint Mary's Cemetery in Fort Mitchell.

INVESTIGATION

On February 7, 1869, two men named Thomas McHale and Michael Conlan of Newport, were arrested on suspicion. McHale was released soon after his arrest. The next day, the Covington Mayor examined Frank Getz, brother to George Getz who was hung in Cincinnati two years prior, and Getz testified that he had heard Conlan talking to someone in a Newport saloon near the end

of the Licking Bridge about shooting a man in Covington. The testimony did not persuade the Mayor, but nor was he released.

On February 11th, though it was confirmed that he had bragged of killing Marshal Thompson, he had also proved an alibi and was released.

George Faulkner, who resided in Ludlow, was arrested on the February 8, 1869 for suspicion. He was held on \$500 bond on February 10. It was considered likely that he was either the shooter or knew who it was. He was later released.

Also, on February 11, Cincinnati Detective Larry Hazen arrested John Robinson, but he too was not identified and was released.

Another was detained in in Brookville, Indiana on February 19 and later released.

Then, on March 1, 1869, Thomas McHale was arrested again, along with his brother-in-law, William White of Newport. They were released on March 3. On March 7, White sued for false arrest.

On the day of the funeral, March 2, 1869, the Coroner, John W. King M.D., held an inquest. He ruled it a homicide, but without any indication as to suspects.

On March 12, Richard Wright was arrested, questioned, and discharged.

On March 13, Cincinnati Patrolman Johnson arrested Charles Delaney on suspicion and housed him in the Hammond Street Station.

On January 30, 1870, Richard Jones was also released after having been arrested on suspicion of Marshal Thompson's murder.

Suspects continued to be found, questioned, and released into 1870, but the case was never solved.

EPILOGUE

On August 12, 1869, Eliza Thompson gave birth to John S. Thompson. She lived with him, another of her children from a previous marriage, and her parents. Her whereabouts after 1880 are unknown.

If you know of any information, artifacts, archives, or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Director at Memorial@Police-Museum.org.

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