

Substitute Patrolman Abraham Bird | Cincinnati Police Department

Age: 49

Served: 7 years

1867 to September 2, 1874

OFFICER

Abraham was born in Ireland and immigrated to the United States. He lived at 11 Kossuth Street, near Court Street.

During the 1860s, he joined the Cincinnati Police Department under Mayor Charles F. Wilstach (R). He continued working during the John F. Torrence (R) administration and was assigned to the 9th Street Station. Shortly after S. S. Davis (R) was elected Mayor, on May 2, 1871 the Cincinnati Daily Gazette announced the political severance of 39 patrolmen, sergeants, and lieutenants – including Patrolman Bird. He was an older officer but was always faithful in the discharge of his duties. Perhaps this was considered by Mayor George W. C. Johnson (D) when he rehired him in 1874 as a Substitute Patrolman.

INCIDENT

On September 2, 1874, Sub Patrolman Bird was detailed, as a private policeman, with fellow 9th Street Station, on-duty Patrolman McGarr at the entrance to the Jackley's Great Vienna

Circus on the Emery Lot, on Vine Street, between Fourth and Fifth Streets.

The circus proprietor was "Uncle" James Davis. His deaf-mute son, J. A. Trim Davis, had free access to the circus and had a reputation for frequent acts of brutality and viciousness. He had married one of the performers a few days before and found that she had been unfaithful. Davis entered the circus, sought out manager Mike Lipman, and wrote him a note to the effect that he knew of her infidelity and that he intended to "put a head on her". Lipman wrote back that he should not as he did not want to see him in trouble. Lipman then went about his business.

Shortly after the doors opened, someone came to Lipman and told him that Davis was making a disturbance at the monkey cage near the dressing room. Davis was agitating the monkeys. Lipman spoke to Uncle James and he advised Lipman to have his son arrested.

Lipman found Patrolmen McGarr and Bird on the street and asked them for assistance. McGarr refused stating that it was the responsibility of the private policemen to handle issues inside. Patrolman Bird went with Lipman and on the way found Private Policeman John A. Webb who went along to assist. They found him by the stable entrance.

The officers tried to escort him out when Davis pulled away, took a pistol from his right rear pants pocket, and fired point blank into Patrolman Bird. Neither officer was armed (firearms would not be standardized for another 13 years) and both turned away from the shots. The bullet went through Patrolman Bird's left arm and into his chest and through both lungs and the aorta at the top of his heart. Davis then struck Patrolman Bird in the mouth with his pistol and with such force that the pistol dropped from his hand. Patrolman Bird fell, exclaiming, "Oh God!" and Davis went to him and kicked him three or four times in the back, picked up his

pistol, put it in his coat pocket, and ran out. A groom came out of the stable and immediately went to Officer Bird and found him already dead.

Patrolmen William A. Fox caught Davis trying to escape via the Race Street entrance and arrested him. Davis put up such a struggle that other officers, Meyers, Brady, and Elchelberger, were needed to overpower him. James Davis was present by then and, while not lacking in parental feeling, wished the policeman had shot his son. He further expounded that he personally selected Patrolman Bird for the detail because of his quiet, steady demeanor.

The officers struggled with Trim Davis all the way to the 9th Street Stationhouse. Once there, they searched him and found in his pocket a loaded single-barreled cartridge Derringer and two or three loose cartridges. Thereafter, he exhibited perfect composure.

Davis' interrogation was conducted in writing by Lieutenant James V. Sargent. Davis completely denied his involvement, even stating once that Patrolman Bird probably shot himself. Soon thereafter, he fell asleep, unconcerned, as though nothing had happened.

FUNERAL

Patrolman Bird's body was placed on a truss of straw until the Coroner arrived. Chief Kierstead ordered the body removed to the 9th Street Stationhouse. He was thereafter removed to Habig's Mortuary.

Patrolman Bird was survived by his wife, Jane Bird (42), and children, Harriet Ella Bird (20), James Bird (18), Emma Bird (14), Richard Bird (12) and Laura Bird (6). The funeral was held on Saturday, September 5, 1874 at 2 p.m. at the Christie

Chapel M. E. Church where he and his family were members. A large number of night patrolmen, the entire night forces from Bremen and Oliver Street Districts, Superintendent Kiersted, and Mayor Johnson escorted Patrolman Bird to the church and as far as Lincoln Park after which the cortège passed through en route to Wesleyan Cemetery.

JUSTICE

On April 2, 1875, J. M. S. Davis, was convicted of Murder in the Second Degree, and given a Life sentence.

He was pardoned by Governor Richard M. Bishop (D) on January 2, 1880, after serving less than five years.

EPILOGUE

Manager Lipman immediately determined to give a benefit performance at any time Colonel Kiersted, Superintendent of Police, may indicate and devote the entire proceeds to Patrolman Bird's family. Colonel Kiersted agreed and all policemen sold tickets. The benefit performances were held in the afternoon and evening of Monday, September 7th. The tent was crowded to capacity for each performance and the Vine and Race Streets entrances were filled with those unable to gain standing room inside. A sum of \$1,415 was collected. A private collection was taken up amounting to about \$350.00 from patrolmen, including \$55 from the 9th Street Station and \$43 from the Hammond Street Station. Altogether, about \$1,700 was given to the widow (more than \$33,000 in 2020 dollars).

Eighteen years after his death, on June 8, 1892, Substitute Patrolman Bird's remains were exhumed and re-interred in Spring Grove Cemetery, Section 12, Lot 96, Grave 2. Jane joined him on January 11, 1912.

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

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