Cincinnati Patrolman Anton “Anthony” Kemper, Jr. | Cincinnati Police Force

Age: 29
Served: 2 years
1874 to February 23, 1876

OFFICER

Anton was born September 5, 1846 in Westfalen, Preurban, Germany, the second of eight children born in Germany and the United Sates to Anton, Sr., a safe maker, and Elisabeth (Burgholz) Kemper. While his father continued to go by “Anton,” by the time he was an adult, the younger Anton went by “Antony” or “Anthony.”

Sometime in the late 1860s, Anthony married a first-generation German, Louisa Diekmann, and started a family. By 1870, they were living at 174 Linn Street on the southeast corner at Clark Street and he was working as a driver. Their first child, Sophia Kemper, was born January 19, 1871. From 1872 to 1873, Anthony was working as a butcher. Anton Kemper III was born July 22, 1873, but died a year later on August 22, 1874. Also in 1874, a third child, Lillian Kemper, was born.

Finally in 1874, Anthony joined the Cincinnati Police Force. He was assigned to the 5th District at Oliver and Linn Streets. He

typically partnered up with Patrolman Martin Kunkel, another first-generation German who was a year older and had been with the Force a year longer. We believe their beat was just west of the Erie Canal close to Liberty Street. Patrolman Kemper was spoken of as a model officer, a perfect gentleman, and well-liked by everyone who knew him.

MURDERER

John Zilar was born March 9, 1856 in Cincinnati, apparently the last of four children born to Cincinnati Ice Company co-owner Rueben S. and Prycilla Zilar. By 1870, John's mother had died, and only John and his 16-year-old brother were still living at home with their father in the 5th Ward. By 1873, 17-year-old Zilar was boarding at 491 Plum Street, and we find no indication that he was working for a living. Perhaps he was working for his father. From 1874 to 1876 he was living at 83 Everett Street. Nothing else is known about the first nineteen years of his life.

INCIDENT

On February 23, 1876, at 3:30 a.m., Patrolman Kemper's attention was drawn to 21-year-old Zilar creating a disturbance in front of Sumpter's Saloon at 15th Street and the canal, near Clinton Street and Central Avenue. Zilar had been evicted from the bar for "creating quite a disturbance" inside. Zilar was an acquaintance of Patrolman Kemper's and instead of arresting him, Patrolman Kemper prevailed upon him to go home. Zilar consented to go to his brother's home about half a block away on Canal Street between 15th and Wade Streets. It seems clear that he was not with his partner, Patrolman Kunkel, when he escorted Zilar

to his brother’s residence. Whether or not Patrolman Kunkel was working that night is unknown.

Patrolman Kemper succeeded in getting Zilar to the top of the stairs and pushed the doorbell when Zilar suddenly punched him in the face which sent him toppling over the banisters to the brick pavement 14 feet below. Zilar fled into his brother’s home.

Lieutenant Wersel, also of the Oliver Street (5th District) Station, was nearby and heard the noise of the fall. We assume Patrolman Kemper yelled out as well. Lieutenant Wessel ran to Patrolman Kemper whom he found unconscious and bleeding from the nose, ears, and mouth and his eyes protruding.

Zilar came out of the home, looked down at the officers assembled and told them, “I have thrown one son of a bitch over these banisters, and if any of you come up here, I’ll throw you over too.” Lieutenant Wessel ascended the stairs and arrested Zilar. Zilar then threatened, “I have killed one of you bluecoats and I will kill more of you before I am done with you. Lieutenant Wessel and Patrolman Sweeny took him to the Oliver Street Station, and he fought desperately all the way.

Doctor P. S. Conner was called to the scene and pronounced the case hopeless. Patrolman Kemper’s skull was fractured and “he had scarcely a whole bone left in his body.” Patrolman Kemper was then conveyed to his home in extremely critical condition.

Later in the morning, Zilar was awakened for court and informed of Patrolman Kemper’s grave condition. He replied that he “was glad the Irish son of a bitch would die.”

DEATH

Patrolman Kemper died at 1:45 p.m. that afternoon from a fracture at the base of his skull. He was the 10th law enforcement officer murdered in Cincinnati and the 11th murdered in Greater Cincinnati.

He was predeceased by his one-year-old son, Anthony Kemper III. Patrolman Kemper was survived by his wife, Louisa (Diekmann) Kemper; daughters, Sophia Kemper and Lillian Kemper; parents, Anton and Wilhelmine Kemper; siblings, Sophie Kemper, Father Herman H. Kemper, Pastor of St. Philomena Church, Maria Kemper, and Johann Kemper; and siblings-in-law Henry Diekmann, Wilhelm Diekmann, and Sophie Diekmann.

His funeral took place at 9 a.m. on February 25, 1876, from his residence, and his cortege was followed by 200 patrolmen under the command of Captain Heheman and Lieutenants Crowley and Wessel. We assume a Requiem Mass was offered, possibly at the St. Peter in Chains Cathedral or St. Philomena Church, and possible by his brother, Father Henry Kemper. However, we can find no indication where or if a religious rite was held. He was buried in St. John's Cemetery in St. Bernard.

JUSTICE

Later in morning of the 23rd, Zilar appeared in Police Court charged with Assault with Intent to Kill. The case was continued due to the expected death of Patrolman Kemper. He was held without bail.

Immediately following Patrolman Kemper's death, Coroner Maley impaneled an inquest after viewing the remains. He adjourned the inquest until the 24th after the postmortem examination by Dr. Conner. After hearing the evidence, the jury came back with the

statement, “We, the jury, do find that the deceased came to his death from a blow received from John Zilar, causing him to fall over the banister some fourteen feet high to the pavement, whereby receiving fracture at the base of the skull causing death.”

A warrant was sworn and served on Zilar for the charge of Murder in the 2nd Degree. He was brought before Police Court Judge Lindemann on February 26, 1876. Judge Lindemann bound him over to the Grand Jury and set a bond of $10,000 ($2.5 Million in today’s dollars). The Grand Jury, on March 9, 1876, reported an indictment for Manslaughter.

Our resources are silent as to the court proceedings, but after his indictment, Zilar would have been almost immediately arraigned in the Court of Common Pleas, no doubt pleaded not guilty, and the judge would have set another bond. He would then have awaited trial. We know that a bond of $12,000 was posted for Zilar on June 16, 1876, but his freedom was short lived. For reasons that are also unknown, probably another arrest, he was back in jail, awaiting trial, on December 16, 1876.

Furthermore, we do not know of the results of his trial, nor if there was a trial. We know that he was married a year later on December 27, 1877, which indicates that he was either acquitted, given a very short sentence, or absconded while out on bond. We do know that he and his new wife moved to Colorado by December 1879, purchased a farm, and had seven children.

Patrolman Kemper’s family filed a civil suit in February 1878 asking for $10,000 in recompense. We do not know the legal maneuverings, but it did not come to trial until January 18, 1879 in front of Common Pleas Judge Force. It was not tried then, nor was it tried until another trial date of December 5, 1979. By then, Zilar was in Colorado. We assume Mrs. Kemper won

a default judgement, but one that she could never collect.

Zilar died in Colorado in 1927 apparently having never atoned for his murder.

NOTE: In moving to Colorado, Zilar would have also effectively disappeared. It is easier for a researcher now to find where he was than it would have been for a detective or process server in the 19th Century.

EPILOGUE

Sophia Kemper died five months after her father on July 19, 1876 at the age of five. In less that two years, Louisa lost her husband and her two oldest children. Her remaining child, Lillian, was not yet two years old.

In 1880, Louisa married Johann “Big John” Hessler, a widower with 13 children. Together, they had three more children. The melded family of 19 moved to Paestum, Illinois. Louisa Hessler lost another husband when Big John died on November 24, 1890. By then, the oldest of the family were in their 30s.

The next year, Patrolman and Louisa Kemper’s only surviving child, Lillian, married Big John’s son from his previous marriage, Anthony Hessler. Together, they had three children, all of whom died without issue.

Louisa Hessler, by then back in Cincinnati, died of stomach cancer on June 22, 1914, a day after her 64th birthday and was buried in St. John Cemetery with Patrolman Kemper.

Twenty-three months after Patrolman Kemper’s murder, on January 24, 1878, his partner, Patrolman Martin Kunkel, was shot and

killed on Dayton Street during a burglary investigation.

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

© This narrative was further researched and revised May 7, 2026 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President/CEO, with significant research provided Cincinnati Police Sergeant David R. Turner (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Researcher; Joyce Meyer, Price Hill Historical Society; and Cincinnati Homicide Detective Edward Zieverink (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Curator. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.