

Patrolman Anton “Anthony” Kemper | Cincinnati Police Department

Age: 23

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 States 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 of Clark Street, and he was working as a driver. We believe they had four children but know the names of only two. Sophia Kemper was born January 19, 1871 and Anthony was then working as a teamster. During 1872 and 1873 he was working as a butcher. Anton Kemper III was born July 22, 1873 but died a year later on August 22, 1874.

Also during 1874, Anthony joined the Cincinnati Police Department. 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 Department for a year longer. We believe their beat was just west of the Erie Canal close to Liberty Street.

MURDERER

John Zilar was born March 9, 1856 in Cincinnati, apparently the last of five children born to Cincinnati Ice Company co-owner, Rueben S., and Prycilla Zilar. By 1870, John's mother had died, and only Zilar and his 16-year-old brother were still living at home with their father in the 5th Ward. Little else is known about the first nineteen years of his life. From at least 1874 to 1876, John Zilar was living at 83 Everett Street with his father.

INCIDENT

On February 23, 1876, at 3:30 a.m., twenty-year-old Zilar was creating a disturbance in front of Sumpter's Saloon at 15th Street and the canal. Zilar, an acquaintance of Patrolman Kemper's, was intoxicated and instead of arresting him, Patrolman Kemper attempted to prevail 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 sidewalk twenty feet below. Zilar fled into his brother's

home.

Lieutenant Wersel heard the noise of the fall and ran to Patrolman Kemper whom he found unconscious and bleeding from the nose, ears, and mouth. Doctor 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.

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 Wersel ascended 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.

They took him to the Oliver Street Station, and he fought desperately all the way.

During the day, Zilar was awakened and informed of Patrolman Kemper's grave condition. To which he replied that he "was glad the Irish son of a bitch would die."

DEATH

Patrolman Kemper died at 1:45 p.m. Patrolman Kemper died at 2 p.m. that afternoon from a fracture at the base of his skull. Patrolman Kemper was survived by his wife, Louisa Kemper; three children; parents; and brother, Father Herman H. Kemper of St. Philomena Church. His funeral took place at 9 a.m. on February 25, 1876 from his residence and his cortege was followed by 102 patrolmen under the command of Captain Heheman and Lieutenants Crowley and Wessel. He was buried in Section B-11, Row L, Grave 55 of St. John's Cemetery in St. Bernard.

JUSTICE

Zilar was charged with Assault with Intent to Kill. During the next day, February 24, 1876, after Patrolman Kemper's death, the charge was changed to Murder. On February 26th, he was bound over to the Grand Jury by Judge Lindeman who set a \$10,000 bond. The Grand Jury, on March 9, 1876, reported an indictment for Manslaughter. He would have been arraigned soon thereafter, would have pleaded Not Guilty, and would have had a bond set again. His original bond of \$10,000 was the equivalent of \$2.5 Million in today's dollars. He was still incarcerated December 17, 1876, awaiting trial. We have found no record of his trial.

Zilar married on December 27, 1877.

Less than one month later, on January 18, 1878, Patrolman Kemper's family's civil suit against Zilar came to trial. We found no results for that trial either.

It is possible that Zilar fled the state before the civil trial. We know he was in Colorado by December 1879. He and his wife purchased a farm and had seven children. He died there in 1927 apparently having never atoned for Patrolman Kemper's murder.

EPILOGUE

Sophia Kemper died five months after her father on July 19, 1876 at the age of 5 years.

Almost two years after Patrolman Kemper's murder, his partner, [Patrolman Martin Kunkel](#), was shot and killed on Dayton Street during a burglary investigation.

Louisa remarried and had three more children. Louisa Hessler died of stomach cancer, June 22, 1917, a day after her 57th

birthday, and was buried in St. John Cemetery with Patrolman Kemper.

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 July 13, 2021 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President, 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.