Constable John Henry Willsey | Coleraine Township



Age: 58
To August 15, 1918

OFFICER

John was born January 14, 1860 in Ohio to farmers, Henry and Hannah J. (Coy) Willsey. He married Mary Belle McCreadie and they had their first child in November 1886.

John was appointed to the Cincinnati Police Department as a Patrolman on March 1, 1887, but he left the Department on August 3, 1887.

John and Mary had two more children and he worked as a fur trader and farmer in Colerain Township.

John was appointed as a Colerain Township Constable about the beginning of World War I. One of Constable Willsey’s duties was to transport prisoners to the Hamilton County Jail; a long trek

from Colerain Township. For these trips he would hire a backup to ride along with him. At times, one of his backups was, Harold Orville Ogg (21) of Venice (Butler County).

Constable Willsey had recently sold his home and reportedly had the cash at his home.

INCIDENT

Constable Willsey was at the home on a 20-acre farm on Dry Ridge Pike near New Baltimore. On Thursday night, August 15, 1918, Ogg went to the Willsey home but Constable Willsey wasn't home. Ogg entered the home and waited for Constable Willsey.

When Willsey entered his home, without saying a word, Ogg shot him in the back of the head, killing him. He then took his horse and buggy. He was seen driving past the Willsey farm, about 7 a.m. on August 16, 1918.

At noon on Saturday, August 17, 1918 Constable Willsey's body was found on the floor of his home with his skull nearly crushed. His purse, gold watch, and revolver were missing.

FUNERAL



Constable John H. Willsey's grave site

Constable Willsey was survived by his wife; children, Rachael A. (Willsey) Diffenbacher (31), Lida M. Willsey (29), and Raymond E. Willsey (15); and sisters, Cornelia (George) Snider, Dianna (John) Colgate, Elizabeth (Alexander) McCreadie, Ann Willsey, Lida Warch. He was buried in the Willsey Cemetery on Eagle Creek Road in Colerain Township.

INVESTIGATION

Cincinnati 10th District Sergeant (and future Police Chief) Eugene Weatherly and Patrolman Fricke found the stolen horse and buggy on Saturday night at Dickmeier's Stable at Spring Grove and Colerain Avenues. It had been sitting on the corner since 4:30 a.m. Also found in the buggy were a bloodied hatchet and other property belonging to Constable Willsey.

On Sunday, August 18, 1918, Colerain Township Squire Rudener issued a warrant for Ogg's arrest.

Monday night, August 19, 1918, Coroner Bauer held an inquest. Cincinnatians, John Kolb of 914 Clark Street and Albert Plucker of 2813 Euclid, were vacationing near the Willsey farm and the heard a shot fired on Thursday night, but paid no attention to it. Coroner Bauer determined that the murder occurred Thursday night, August 15, 1918.

While several law enforcement agencies in Butler and Hamilton Counties searched for Ogg, he was reportedly sighted in Hamilton with a Hamilton girl, then in Cincinnati, and then in Bellevue, Kentucky. On August 21, 1918 a postcard was received by Marlon Hines of Venice, purportedly from Ogg, announcing his recent marriage on the previous night and his intention to travel to Tulsa, Oklahoma with his bride. It was postmarked in St. Louis, Missouri.

Exactly one month later, Ogg was found working in a construction camp on the Army base in Norfolk, Virginia on September 21, 1918. He was returned to Hamilton County on September 26, 1918.

JUSTICE

Coroner Bauer held a hearing during which Ogg admitted that he went to Willsey's home and killed Constable Willsey without uttering a word. The Coroner referred the matter to the Grand Jury. On December 10, 1918, Ogg was indicted on a charge of 1st Degree Murder.

The case came to trial in front of Hamilton County Court Judge Fred L. Hoffmann on April 30, 1919. Assistant County Prosecutor Charles H. Elston prosecuted while former assistant prosecutor, Walter M. Locke, and Paul Geoghagen defended Ogg with a plea of insanity. During the trial, Ogg repeatedly threatened Willsey's family. The case went to the jury on May 8, 1919 after 59 witnesses testified and after the judge gave them 14 different verdict options. They found him guilty of 2nd Degree Murder on May 10. On May 13, 1919 Judge Hoffmann sentenced Ogg to Life Imprisonment with the possibility of parole.

On February 7, 1943, having been in prison 22 years, Ogg appeared before the State Board of Parole. His case was continued to January 1935. Parole was denied.

His case was to come before the Board again during May 1940, but with a month to go, he and Charles Kenny escaped from the London Prison on April 4, 1940. They stole a 1936 Chevrolet in Springfield, Ohio on Saturday, April 13, 1940. It was found abandoned and out of gas at 10 a.m. on Sunday the 14th in Wilmington by Police Chief Everett Downing and Sergeant H.S.

Adams. By April 25, 1940 Ogg was back in prison having been captured in Bay Minette, Alabama.

Regardless, on June 18, 1942 Ogg was paroled effective September 1, 1942, to Texas.

EPILOGUE

At some point, Ogg returned to Cincinnati and worked as a contractor. At 61, during March 1959, he married Louise Henderson (29). He died in Cincinnati on October 17, 1979 at the age of 82 and is buried in Spring Grove Cemetery.

During 2008, Colerain Township Police Sergeant Angela Meyer submitted to the Ohio and national law enforcement memorials applications to have Constable Willsey inducted. His granddaughter, Mary Jane Sefton, aged 82, of Guilford, Indiana, attended his induction ceremony at the national memorial.

If you have 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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