

Deputy Sheriff Walter Leslie Francis | Hamilton County Sheriff's Office



Deputy
Walter
Leslie
Francis

Age: 48

Served: 7½ years

September 9, 1913 to November 16, 1920 Cincinnati Police Department

January 8, 1935 to May 20, 1935 Hamilton County Sheriff's Office

OFFICER

Walter and his twin sister were born January 25, 1887 in Manchester, Monroe Township, Adams County, Ohio, the last two of 13 children born to Enoch Moses and Carrolene (Lewis) Francis. His sister died at or near birth and was not named.

He could trace his lineage back to the Revolutionary War and

beyond. Only nine of his siblings survived until 1900, but his parents, four of five brothers, and one sister survived into their late 70s, 80s, and 90s. Walter had good reason to expect a long life.

By April 1910, he was still living in Monroe Township, working as a farmer, and married to Emma (Jenkins) Francis. They moved to Cincinnati in 1911, and he secured employment as a bellman at the Nicholas Hotel near 4th and Race Streets.

CINCINNATI PATROLMAN

On September 9, 1913, Walter was appointed to the Cincinnati Police Department as a Substitute Patrolman. The newspapers quickly glommed onto the fact that he was the tallest patrolman in the county. He was promoted to Patrolman on December 30, 1913, which was rather quickly compared to others in that era. Patrolman Francis resigned on November 16, 1920 with seven years of service to Cincinnati.

CIVILIAN

The citizens on his beat thought he was returning to his family's farm, based on an ad they put in the newspaper. That may have been the case considering his father's advanced years. His father died in 1923, but by then Walter was already back in Cincinnati and working as a machinist at the Ford Model T assembly plant at 660 Lincoln Avenue.

Emma Francis died April 26, 1927, without issue. Patrolman Francis moved to 120 E. Clifton.

Walter's nephew, Estele Francis, came to Cincinnati from Manchester and, in April 1928, he also joined the Cincinnati Police Department as a Patrolman.

By 1930, Walter was promoted to Inspector at the Ford plant,

and before 1935 he was the chief buyer and lived at 1618 Walnut Street.

HAMILTON COUNTY DEPUTY

For almost a century between the 1840s and 1930s, Hamilton County sheriffs served a single term once elected. In 1935, George A. Lutz was elected and appointed his friend Patrolman Francis as Deputy Sheriff. Both considered that Deputy Walter Francis would run for the next term in 1938. Once again, Deputy Francis was the tallest man in local law enforcement.

INCIDENT

On May 20, 1935, shortly after 3 a.m., Deputies Francis and Conrad Bradford, while on patrol, received a call for a hold-up in a small park in the rear of 81 Independence Street (now Matthews Drive) of the Lockland Subdivision. Lieutenant William Wiggeringloh also responded. Deputies Bradford and Francis found John Donaldson tied to a tree with wire and a female, Jessie Jamison, almost speechless from fright and exhaustion. The couple advised the deputies that they had been held up for \$16.18 by two men armed with a revolver and shotgun. They then criminally assaulted the girl. After releasing Donaldson, the two deputies went to the trunk of their patrol car for additional weapons. At about 4:15 a.m., Deputy Francis pulled a sawed-off shotgun out of the trunk, and it discharged into his abdomen. Deputies rushed him to Cincinnati General Hospital.

DEATH

Deputy Francis was already dead when he arrived at the hospital. His death certificate indicates that his death was

apparently nearly instantaneous. His nephew, Cincinnati Patrolman Estele Francis, was listed as the informant.

He was predeceased by his parents, two sisters who died at birth, and siblings, Mary Elizabeth, Caroline, William, and Eleanor "Nora." Deputy Francis was survived by his other siblings, Albert Alonzo Francis, Theodore "Dose" Francis, John Ruggles Francis, Charles Leonard Francis, Martha Ann Francis, and Cora Alice (Henry) Tumbleson and numerous nieces and nephews, including Cincinnati Patrolman Albert Estele Francis.

His remains were moved to Dunkmann & Dalbert Funeral Home on Glenway Avenue at Rosemont Avenue and laid out there. On May 24, 1935, a funeral was held at the Island Creek Methodist Church in his hometown of Manchester. So many attended the services that some were asked to leave for fear of structural damage to the building. He is buried in the Manchester (also known as the Independent Order of Oddfellows) Cemetery.

INVESTIGATION

Thirty deputies happened to be attending Red Cross training at the Courthouse and Captain Coddington took the entire contingent with him to the Lockland Subdivision for the search. They quickly found and arrested Lee Jones (40). Jones gave up his accomplice, Dan, alias David, Cartwright (30). They also found the shotgun used by Cartwright in the offense. Later they arrested Jones, whose address was roughly the same as where the crime occurred.

Hamilton County Sheriff Patrol Commander Captain Charles Coddington found the hammer of the shotgun broken and surmised that when Deputy Francis pulled the shotgun the hammer was caught on some tools in the trunk, broke, and struck the primer on a loaded shotshell. The coroner ruled his death an accident.

JUSTICE

Jones and Cartwright were charged with the robbery and assault and taken before Magistrate Howard Hilton at Norwood. By June 7, 1937, the Hamilton County Grand Jury separately indicted them.

They went to trial on June 27, 1935, without a jury, before Judge Frederick L. Hoffman. By the end of the day, the judge found them guilty and sentenced both to ten to 25 years in the Ohio Penitentiary. We have not found their release date.

EPILOGUE

On May 26, 1945, a fight erupted inside a bar where off-duty Patrolman Estele Francis was enjoying himself, sitting at a table, with another man and two ladies. A fight broke out in the bar. Patrolman Francis involved himself in the fight and Fred Nash, a twice convicted, violent ex-convict and pugilist "sucker punched" him, fracturing his skull. He died three days later on May 29, 1945, almost exactly ten years after the death of Deputy Francis.

Detectives could not interview the comatose Patrolman Francis. Nor could they establish from the witnesses, many of which were women who were also striking the patrolman with their umbrellas, that Patrolman Francis was acting as a peacekeeper. They charged Nash with Murder and the Grand Jury indicted him for 2nd Degree.

The only witness at the trial against Nash was a hostile witness. A jury found Nash guilty of Assault and Battery, ignoring the fact that it resulted in Patrolman Francis's death. With no other alternative, the judge sentenced Nash to the Workhouse and five years' probation.

Nash violated that probation and was sentenced to another six months in 1949. In June 1951, Nash was arrested again in a shooting affray at another bar. Not the actual shooter, he was convicted of a lesser offense. In November 1952, he was convicted of Fraud. It appears he moved to Cleveland and died in 1957.

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

© This narrative was researched and revised May 1, 2025 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President/CEO with assistance from Cincinnati Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Curator. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.