

Lieutenant Samuel Thaddeus Corbin | Cincinnati Police Department



Age: 62

Served: 27½ years

June 11, 1883 to January 22, 1911

OFFICER

Sam was born on October 23, 1848 in the 2nd District of Campbell County, the oldest of 6 children born to John H. and Jane Elizabeth (Daniel) Corbin. He grew up on one of two contiguous Corbin Family farms and on September 6, 1869 married Martha Washington Young. By 1880, they had three children and Sam moved his family to Cincinnati where he worked as a Collector on the Mt. Adams Inclined Plane.

On June 11, 1883 he joined the Cincinnati Police Department and was assigned to the new Patrol Wagon 2 working in the toughest of all city beats; the Bottoms. He made himself famous in police circles with his daring and fearlessness.

Once he posed as a landlord of a 7th Street boarding house where a gang was secreting themselves. As each came home to the room, he arrested them. When he had all seven, he called for the posse to come take them away. During the 1884 Courthouse riots, while 10,000 rioted and burned the Courthouse, he was one of a small band of men who captured a cannon from a mob on Court Street.

On March 31, 1886 all 400 police officers serving at the pleasure of the Mayor were dismissed. The next day, on April 1, 1886, a new Board of Police Commissioners began testing and hiring 300 officers to formulate a new, non-partisan police department. Many, if not most, of the officers from the previous force were deemed ill-fit to wear the badge, but on June 7, 1886 Sam was nominated to be rehired as a Patrolman and was sworn in on June 19, 1886.

As a patrolman he was known at Headquarters for his effectiveness, efficiency, and bravery. He was the strongest man on the force and, according to Superintendent Phillip Deitsch, "the neatest." During December 1887, Chief Deitsch was so impressed with him that he named him acting sergeant before the rank of Sergeant had been officially created. On February 23, 1891 he was one of the first Patrolmen officially promoted to Sergeant. He continued his work in running down criminals and was quickly appointed Acting Lieutenant on December 1, 1893 and officially promoted to that rank on April 17, 1895. Chief Deitsch said of him, "Corbin would face a cyclone with a wisp of a straw if duty demanded it."

During the last decade of the 19th Century, Corbin was involved in many of the high profile incidents in the city including a fire at Music Hall, arrests of notorious felons, a fire that leveled an entire block north of the Suspension Bridge and killed two firemen, and the investigation into the decapitation death of Pearl Bryan. During June 1897, he was one of three lieutenants sent with a sizable contingent to the

Tennessee Centennial celebration. A very popular boss, he once led his impromptu baseball team from the Hammond Street Station, the "Corbin Killers," to an 82-81 rout of Casey's Yearlings from Headquarters.

On May 1, 1901 he was named "Lieutenant-in-Charge," commonly referred to as "Night Chief" and remained as such for the next decade.

INCIDENT

On January 11, 1911 Night Chief Corbin, already stricken with a heavy cold, was one of the first responders on the scene at the Great Chamber of Commerce Fire. He stood at the door assisting the orderly exit of panic-stricken crowds and ran into the burning building a number of times to rescue people. During one of these entries, he tripped over a fire hose, injuring his knee, but continued his efforts.

Eventually, from the mist, steam, and water, he was wet to the skin and his waterlogged uniform iced over. He got much sicker and tried to work the next day but had to return home at midnight. Dr. J. T. McKibben responded to his home and administered oxygen, but pneumonia had irreversibly set in. On Sunday, January 15, 1911 Lieutenant Corbin took a turn for the worse.

DEATH

Eleven days after the fire, at 5:45 p.m. on January 22, 1911, Dr. McKibben spoke to reporters and advised that nothing else could be done for the Lieutenant. He passed away an hour later at 6:45 p.m.

He was predeceased by his first son, Coleman L. Corbin, and siblings, Jasper Corbin, Martha Corbin, and Lucy Corbin.

Lieutenant Corbin was survived by his wife of 41 years, Martha Washington (Young) Corbin (58), of whom he once told the Mayor, "I have the best wife on Earth." He was also survived by two children, Bertha Maude Corbin (35) and Samuel D. Corbin (30), and two siblings, William Corbin (55) and Theophilus (Thomas) Corbin (51).

His body lay in state at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Price Hill where he was a member. The Cincinnati Enquirer reported that "not since the death of the late Chief Phil Deitsch has the death of any police official been so sincerely mourned." Floral bouquets from all 10 police districts, among many others, surrounded his coffin. The pall bearers were Lieutenants Renkert, Drout, Watson, Duffy, Geist, Conrad, Krumpe, and Copelan. Every Lieutenant of the Police Department was present and in full uniform.

His body was put aboard a train bound for his hometown, California, Kentucky, accompanied by 12 Knights Templar, of which he was also a member. The train was met by hundreds of friends. Twenty-five carriages followed the hearse to Beach Grove where he was buried in the Corbin Family Graveyard on Washington Trace Road.

His son, Samuel, died in April 1919 and his wife, Martha, died during May 1919 and both joined him in the Corbin Cemetery. Maude rejoined them all in January 1941.

EPILOGUE

Lieutenant Corbin's great grandson, Police Sergeant William Kinney, serves in Cincinnati Police District Five.

Recently, John Hollingsworth, a historical, biographical writer in St. Charles, Missouri, came across Lieutenant Corbin's Colt New Police, .32 caliber revolver and purchased it. On Monday, June 20, 2016, Mr. Hollingsworth delivered the sidearm back to the family and he and Officer Kinney traveled to Lieutenant Corbin's grave to again honor him for his service and sacrifice.



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

© This narrative was researched and revised on May 9, 2016 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President, and originally written with assistance from Cincinnati Police Sergeant Thomas A. Waller (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society Past Vice President, and Cincinnati Detective Richard W. Gross (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Curator. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society.