

Marshal Henry Sylvester Knapp | Addyston Village



Badge: 1
Age: 41
Served: 2 years
January 1, 1924 to February 27, 1926

OFFICER

Henry was born July 26, 1884 in Indiana to Ezra “Henry” and Louisa (Johnson) Knapp. At 15, he was living in Indianapolis and running a buzz saw, probably at a lumber mill.

Four years later, Henry had moved to Fern Bank (now a portion of Sayler Park). On August 13, 1904, at the age of 20, he was viciously attacked from behind by a 26-year-old who was vying for the affections of the 17-year-old girl that Henry was with. Dazed by the blow, Henry turned around, and pulled a revolver. It appeared the other man was drawing a weapon as well and Henry shot him, killing him instantly. After testimony by the girl, no charges were filed.

Two months later, he was employed to take wagons of coal from the Fairmount Coal Yards to the generating station at Harrison and Colerain Avenues while the normal workers were on strike and trying to shut down the peoples' electricity using violence. On October 7, 1904, he was attacked and savagely beaten about the head and arm. The next day, Cincinnati Police Chief Millikin responded to the coal yards with a contingent of patrolmen to drive the wagons. One citizen, Henry Knapp, also showed up and went with the officers to show them how to dump the wagons at the generation station. He was attacked again with a brick thrown striking his head and transported to the hospital.

On October 27, 1908 he married divorcee Nora L. (Cleveland) Hawley and took in her child from her previous marriage.

By 1910, they were living in Fernbank Village with a new toddler. He was working as a coremaker at the PNC Foundry. On September 12, 1918, he was living in Sekitan, a portion of Addyston, and working at the United States Pipe and Foundry Company. By 1920, they added two more sons.

In October 1923, Henry and two other men registered as candidates for Addyston Village Marshal. Henry won the election in November.

In his third month, he responded to a stabbing during a theatrical performance at Mrs. Jennie Croul's boarding house in the Sekitan neighborhood. As part of the play, the heroine, Mrs. Croul, plunged a knife into the chest of her antagonist, one of her boarders. But somehow a real knife was used. His wound was not serious, and Marshal Knapp determined the incident to be an accident.

Two weeks later, a man drinking illegal liquor was bragging to a woman about his ability to protect her. He found a man walking along the roadway and swung his nearly empty bottle at the man's head. The man was Marshal Knapp on his nightly

rounds. After dodging the bottle, Marshal Knapp locked the man up for possession of bootleg liquor.

Another two weeks later, on April 15, 1924, Marshal Knapp raided a residence and seized eight gallons of moonshine.

Three weeks later, he investigated a homicide in a poolroom where one combatant, the victim, had a razor and the other had a poker.

Things calmed down for six months, but in January 1925, a man escaped from Longview Mental Hospital and was recaptured by Marshal Knapp on January 11th. The man then set his cell on fire and were it not for Marshal Knapp's quick actions, he would have died.

Then a devastating rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl was discovered. She lived in North Bend but was abducted on her way home from school in Addyston. Within hours, Marshal Knapp found a witness to another man's presence near the site of the murder in a wooded area and he, along with his deputy, found and arrested the murderer at an Addyston boarding house. The man confessed at the Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office and was executed a year after the offense.

Marshal Knapp became one of the most popular men in western Hamilton County and was easily re-elected in 1925.

The beginning of 1926 looked like it was going to be about rabid dogs. But by February, Marshal Knapp had found and killed 24 dogs infected with rabies. There were no more sightings.

He continued with his normal duties.

MURDERERS

Clarence Warner was born about 1898 in Tennessee and his

parents were from Tennessee. We know nothing more of him other than he was not married, living in a common-law relationship with Mrs. Annie Roberson in a boarding house in Hopkinsville, and probably involved in the illicit bootleg business during Prohibition. Hopkinsville was a labor settlement of the United States Pipe and Foundry Company.

Mrs. Annie Claye Roberson was born about 1899 in Georgia and her parents were also from Georgia. She was married at 14 years of age and still married in 1926. We know nothing else about her except that by 1926 she was living with Clarence Warner and a bootlegger. On or about February 12, 1926, Marshal Knapp arrested Roberson for possession of alcohol. She was fined \$300 (equivalent today to \$5000). Apparently, it was a sizable seizure, and it would lead to his death.

INCIDENT

During the morning of February 27, 1926, Marshal Knapp went to the same Hopkinsville boarding house with a warrant for George Patterson. Roberson saw him coming toward the house and told Warner, "Here comes Knapp. I'm going to kill him with this glass jar!"

When Marshal Knapp came through the door, she hurled the jar at him. She also pulled a revolver on him and held him a bay. Mrs. Roberson then told Warner to retrieve another revolver from a dresser drawer, which he did. Together, they disarmed Marshal Knapp and ordered him from the house. Unarmed, Marshal Knapp chose to leave.

Roberson, intent on embarrassing Marshal Knapp, ordered him back at gunpoint and took his badge and Patterson's warrant. The theft of the badge and warrant was more than Marshal Knapp would take. He protested and Warner shot him with his own revolver. The bullet entered his forehead and ran the circumference of the interior of the skull to the rear.

Mrs. Roberson and Warner then fled the house.

Deputy Marshal Richard Rupe was called and responded. He found Marshal Knapp's badge and revolver and Patterson's warrant on the kitchen table. A single shot had been fired from the revolver. He took Marshal Knapp by automobile to his home where physicians examined him and initially determined that while the wound was serious, it was not dangerous.

Marshal Knapp's condition began to deteriorate late on the night of the 27th and he was transported to Bethesda Hospital in Cincinnati. The bullet was surgically removed, and doctors were optimistic that he would recover.

INVESTIGATION

News of the shooting spread rapidly, and scores of citizens formed a posse to find the perpetrators. Deputy Marshal Isadore Chinn, half a mile away and unaware of the shooting, saw Warner running with a revolver in his hand and took him into custody just as the posse arrived. They then took him to the Addyston jail and locked him up.

While confined, he admitted being present during the shooting but alternately admitted firing the shot and then claiming that Roberson did.

Highly energized citizens began surrounding the Addyston jail and it was thought they would break in and lynch Warner. Mayor William Gray notified Hamilton County Sheriff Richard B. Witt and he dispatched Chief Deputy Sheriff Fred Sperber and three deputies. After conferring with Mayor Gray, Warner was removed to the Hamilton County Jail in Cincinnati.

Roberson boarded a bus to escape. Cincinnati and other village law enforcement agencies were requested to search for her. She surrendered five days later, on March 2nd, to Cincinnati

Detective Chief Emmett D. Kirgan. She denied shooting the Marshal. He directed that she be taken to the Hamilton County Jail and placed in solitary confinement.

On March 6, 1926, after he served a week of solitary confinement, Warner decided to tell "the truth" and admit that he was the one who shot the marshal.

DEATH

Marshal Knapp, on March 14, 1926, succumbed to shock meningitis sixteen days after being shot.

Marshal Knapp was survived by his wife, Norma (43) children; John James Knapp (10), Floy Henrietta Knapp (8), and Elton Knapp (7); father, Henry Ezra Knapp; and siblings, Harry Knapp, James Franklin (Abbie) Knapp, Anna Belle (John) Price, and Nellie Grace Rheinfrank.

On March 17, 1926, the Klu Klux Klan sent eight robed members to Addyston to demonstrate against disorder and lawlessness prior Marshal Knapp's funeral. Members of organizations to which Marshal Knapp belonged – Junior Order, Red Men of America, and the Loyal Order of Moose – met at the Junior Order Hall and then joined the Klansman in parading up and down Addyston's streets, ending at the Methodist Church.

At 2 p.m., a funeral was held from his home to the Methodist Church, officiated by Reverend Henry Brown. The church was filled, and hundreds waited outside. His remains were escorted to Maple Grove Cemetery in Cleves. Ceremonies were additionally conducted by the Junior Order, Red Men of America, and the Loyal Order of Moose organizations.

JUSTICE

On March 15, 1926, the day following the marshal's death, Assistant Hamilton County Prosecutor Louis Schneider announced that he would take the case to the Grand Jury and request indictments for First Degree Murder. On March 18th, the Hamilton County Grand Jury returned three indictments against for each – first degree murder of a police officer, murder in the perpetration of a robbery, and premeditated murder. They were arraigned the next day on the 19th before Judge Edward M. Hurley. He set their trial for April 19th before Judge Thomas H. Darby.

Assistant Prosecutor Schneider prosecuted, and Warner was defended by Attorney James McDonald. On April 26, 1926, Warner testified on his own behalf as to the details of the murder, at least as he saw them. The case went to the jury before noon on April 27th. They returned a guilty verdict the next day for Murder with a recommendation of mercy and a sentence of life without possibility of parole.

Mrs. Roberson's trial was set for May 17th. She was the first woman in Hamilton County facing First Degree Murder charges. Schneider prosecuted before Judge Darby. Ellis B. Gregg and Edward Moeller defended her. Warner was brought from the Ohio State Penitentiary to testify. The jury was given the case on May 20th and after five hours of deliberations came back with a guilty verdict for Second Degree Murder. Judge Darby sentenced her to life imprisonment in the Woman's Reformatory in Marysville.

EPILOGUE

Marshal Knapp's father, after the funeral, went back home to Ripley County, Indiana and died one week after his son.

Nora Knapp suffered from a heart blockage less than two years

later and died at the age of 44. By then their children were 12, 10, and 9 years old and at least three of their grandparents had died, maybe all four, and both of their parents. We cannot find who raised them afterward, but all three lived to adulthood and married.

Mrs. Roberson was paroled to Georgia in 1936 having served only ten years. She was 37.

On March 29, 1960, Ohio Democrat Governor Michael DiSalle announced that he was going against the jury's decision and judge's sentence and make Warner eligible for parole. On April 26th, he further announced that he was paroling him on June 24th. Warner announced his intention to move to Missouri with his sister. He was 72.

We believe Marshal Knapp had two grandsons, both of whom died without issue.

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

© This narrative was further researched and revised on June 29, 2022 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President, with research assistance from Cincinnati Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Curator, and SORTA Operations Superintendent Philip Lind (Retired, Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Registrar. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum.