

# Matron Rosa A. (Vonderheide) (Dyer) Regan | Cincinnati Police House of Detention



Age: 40

Served: 14 years

December 7, 1893 to February 9, 1908

## **OFFICER**

Rosie was born November 25, 1867 in Cincinnati to Henry (a carpenter born in Oldenberg) and Mary (of Ohio) Vonderheide. At three-years-old, her family lived in the 13th Ward near the river in the lower West End.

She married Henry Frederick Dyer on February 16, 1887, in a wedding officiated by Fr. Francis Henry Kessing in St. Anthony Catholic Church. She bore him two sons, Raymond Dyer (1887) and Frederick Walter Dyer (1892).

Henry worked with the railroad; first as an engine wiper, then fireman, then engineer. Over seven years, they lived in five residences, 64 Carr Street, 203 Freeman Avenue, 861 W. 6th, then 25 Sloo Street, but always within blocks of the Ohio River. Upon entering his 30s, Henry contracted endocarditis, a bacterial infection of the heart.

As her husband's symptoms became more pronounced and debilitating, with two young sons, Rosa sought employment. On December 7, 1893 she was nominated for the position of janitress at the Cincinnati Police House of Detention at the Bremen Street Station. It paid \$35 a month. She was approved ten days later, December 17th.

Henry died on May 5, 1894, at 31 years of age. His funeral was held on May 9th at the Third Presbyterian Church.

During 1894, House of Detention Matron Meade became seriously ill, and Mrs. Dyer filled in for her. On September 25, 1894, Janitress Dyer was appointed Station-house Keeper. We believe this was a promotion and may have involved the whole 3rd District stationhouse. Regardless, a week later, on October 2, 1884, the Matron complement was increased to three with the appointment of Mrs. Dyer and Miss Amelia Winters. Each lady worked eight-hour shifts, seven days a week. For Mrs. Dyer it was a \$15 a month raise from her Janitress position.

Five months after her husband's death, on October 26, 1894, Matron Dyer provided her sons with a stepfather. She married an Irish immigrant, John F. Regan, another locomotive engineer on the Big Four Railroad, in Chicago.

In 1899, the House of Detention moved to the 3rd floor of City Hall.

On April 1, 1901, the three matrons petitioned for a Sunday off

every fourth Sunday. The Public Safety Commission referred to Superintendent of Police Philip Deitsch the request and he that the efficiency of their service would not be impaired. The request was granted. On September 10, 1901, they petitioned the Commission again to increase annual vacations from seven days to fourteen. On the 24th, that too was granted.

## **INCIDENT**

On Saturday afternoon, February 8, 1908, while working at City Hall, Matron Regan needed to use the Police Elevator inside the northwest corner of the courtyard, but the operator was absent. She attempted to control the car herself, but as she descended, something happened that caused her to try to jump off. Her body got caught between the elevator car and the shaft and she was crushed. She was taken to the City Hospital.

## **DEATH**

John Regan came to her bedside and remained there until her death at 8 a.m. the next morning, February 9, 1908. She is the first female law enforcement officer to die in the line of duty in Greater Cincinnati and the second in the United States. At the inquest, Coroner Otis Cameron ruled that she died from "shock following multiple injuries."

Matron Regan was survived by her aged mother, Mrs. Mary Vonderheide; husband, John F. Regan (55); and children, Raymond Dyer (20) and Walter Frederick Dyer (15).

A funeral service was conducted at the Regan home at 921 West Court Street. A requiem high mass was celebrated by Fr. Mulvihill at St. Peter in Chain Cathedral on February 12, 1908.

She is buried in St. Joseph's (New) Cemetery.

## **EPILOGUE**

Henry and Rosie's son, Raymond, married in 1908. By 1910 he was living at 948 W. 7th Street with his wife, new daughter, brother, and stepfather, John Regan. Rosie's second husband, John Regan, died October 31, 1921 at the age of 68, also from myocarditis, similar to the cause of her first husband's death.

For many years, the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society, Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, and National Law Enforcement Memorial believed that Hamilton County [Jail Matron Anna Hart](#) was the first female to die in the line of duty in America. Joyce Meyers, researcher for the Price Hill Historical Society, during 2015, came across the reporting of Matron Regan's death and reported her finding to the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society. Together, she and the Society researched Matron Regan's life and death. During the research, we found another matron in New York had predeceased her in 1906, so Anna Hart was 3rd and Rosie was 2nd.

We also found that Matron Regan had no headstone. Nor was she apparently afforded burial ceremonies we have become accustomed to for line of duty deaths.

Inclusion on any law enforcement memorial has become an intensive process and the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society did its best to ascertain the necessary data for the National Memorial and the Cincinnati Police/Fraternal Order of Police Memorial on Ezzard Charles Drive. One criterion is that relatives are contacted in order to verify the data, especially the spelling of the name. We had a very difficult time doing so until Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati Airport [Police Chief](#)

[Thomas Mentrup](#) (Retired) deciphered research data and determined that Matron Regan was previously married and widowed and that her first husband had been Henry Dyer. With that information, we found living ancestors.

The Greater Cincinnati Police Museum, on March 6, 2018, submitted to the National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial an application for Matron Regan to be added to the national monument. On March 8, 2019, we received an affirmative response. On May 13, 2019, during a candlelight vigil, her name, engraved in the granite memorial in Washington D. C., was uncovered and witnessed by thousands, including several members of her family.



On May 18, 2018, during Police Memorial Week, the Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society hosted a grave rededication ceremony which included media, Matron Regan's descendants, dozens of law enforcement officials, and Cincinnati Police Chief Eliot Issac. The Museum's Historian, retired Cincinnati Police Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III, served as master of ceremonies. The Museum Director, retired Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer, gave the keynote address. Hamilton County Sheriff James Neil also spoke. The Hamilton County Police Association provided an honor guard, and Mariemont Police Officer Steve Watt played the bagpipes. Schott Monument donated a gravestone engraved with a Police Matron badge.

The single photograph we were able to obtain of Matron Regan was grainy and rejected for display on the National Memorial's

website. Miss Cassandra Kramer of Kansas City, Kansas, a multi-talented teenage graphic artist, spent many hours painstakingly adding sharpened features and creating the image we display today. It was accepted by the National site as well and honors Matron Regan on the National website.

There are several great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren who survive Matron Regan.

If you know of any information, artifacts, archives, or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at [Memorial@Police-Museum.org](mailto:Memorial@Police-Museum.org).

*© This line of duty death was rediscovered in 2016 by Joyce Meyer, Price Hill Historical Society Historian. This narrative was further researched and revised February 9, 2023 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President/CEO, with further research by Cincinnati Homicide Detective Edward W. Zieverink III (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Historian, and Northern Kentucky Greater Cincinnati Airport Police Chief Thomas Mentrup (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Volunteer, and photo enhancement by Cassandra Kramer, currently of San Antonio, Texas. All rights are reserved to them and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum*