

Patrolman Benjamin “Ben” Franklin Law | Covington Police Department

One Hundred Years Ago on January 5, 1925



Age: 46
Served: 7 years
November 17, 1917 to January 5, 1925

OFFICER

Ben was born July 2, 1879 in Vanceburg, Lewis County, Kentucky, the fifth of six children born to Henry V. “Martin” Laugh (of Moscow, Ohio), and Frances Celvina “Fannie” (Morgan) Laugh (of Kenton County). The family moved often, and Henry generally

worked in labor jobs. By June 1900, the family moved back to Henry's hometown of Moscow, and he had the names of all in his family 'Americanized' to "Law."

In June 1900, 21-year-old Ben was working as a laborer in a mill in Moscow. He then moved to Cincinnati. On July 30, 1901, Ben married Marguerite "Maggie" Tearne. They were living at 1933 Eastern Avenue, and he was a Lumber Inspector. On July 19, 1902, while living at 2020 Gladstone Drive, Marguerite gave birth to their first child, Irene. By 1905, they were living at 2068 Eastern Avenue, and he was working for a railroad.

At the beginning of 1905, Ben was crushed under a Big Four freight train and suffered a broken arm, dislocated shoulder, and numerous life-threatening injuries. He was admitted to the Cincinnati City Hospital where he battled back from the brink of death. Almost a month later, on January 30th, Maggie was also admitted to the same hospital with pneumonia. Maggie died on February 16, 1905. Ben, still a recovering patient, was with her at the end. She was buried in Moscow Cemetery.

On January 7, 1908, by then a Watchman, Ben married Mary Wirtholter of Madisonville, and they moved into 1929 Gerrard Street in Covington. Later in the year, he took a job as a Machinist. By the end of 1908, he was working as a Private Policeman. Also that year, on November 20th, they had their first child together, Farrel Ben Law, and were living at 1923 Eastern Avenue in Covington. Together, they had three children in addition to Irene. By April 1909, they moved to 1003 Scott Street.

By 1912, Ben was again working as a Watchman, and they were living at No. 6 Lewis Street. Two years later, they were living at 1847 Russell Street.

On November 17, 1917, the City of Covington announced that Ben

finished sixth among eleven men who passed the Civil Service examination for the position of Patrolman. We do not know when he was appointed to the position, but we do know it was before or during 1918. Over the next few years, he became a vigilant and popular policeman.

His and his family's final move was to 1831 Russell Street, six houses from the intersection of 19th and Russell Streets.

INCIDENT

On December 30, 1924, soon after Louis Kraut closed and locked the front door of the Foltz Grocery and Baking Company at 19th and Russell Streets, Archibald Schultz was standing outside his home on 19th Street. A man pressed a firearm against his side and ordered him to convince Kraut to reopen the store under the pretext of needing to make a purchase. Schultz complied and Kraut opened the door. The man and Schultz went inside and the robber told them to raise their hands. Schultz's son saw this from outside and ran to Patrolman Law's home for help.

Patrolman Law retrieved his revolver and police coat. Mary begged him to be careful and his son, Farrell, followed him to the store. As the robber was heading toward the entrance, he saw Patrolman Law coming toward it from the outside. While using Schultz as a shield, the robber fired through the glass door with a .45 Automatic Colt Pistol, striking Patrolman Law three times, knocking him to the ground. Patrolman Law could not fire back with Schultz in between. His revolver discharged once as he fell, but into the ceiling. As Mary looked on in horror, she saw the robber run out past the prostrate patrolman, and shoot him two more times, including the final shot to the back near his spine. Patrolman Law lifted himself up off the ground and fired a shot at the fleeing suspects (he believed there was an

accomplice also running away). He believed the shot hit one of them.

His son, Farrell ran to his critically injured father and Patrolman Law told him to call headquarters to report the robbery.

The robber or robbers escaped with \$55.00 (about \$1000 in 2024 dollars) and were last seen running to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad tracks.

Patrolman Law was rushed to Saint Elizabeth Hospital where physicians declared his condition as critical with five bullet wounds.

DEATH

One December 31, 1924, The Cincinnati Enquirer reported that Patrolman Law may die from his wound. By January 2nd, they were reporting his condition as unchanged, but in no immediate danger, though the physicians feared infection from the brass jacketed bullets still in his body. Patrolman Law, against the odds, just as he had when crushed by the train, began to improve on January 4th. But infections took over and at 10:45 p.m. on January 5, 1925, two days before his and Mary's 17th wedding anniversary, he succumbed, becoming the fourth Covington Police Department officer to die in the line of duty.

Patrolman Law was also survived by his children: Mrs. Irene F. Sutton (19), Farrell Ben Law (15), Frances Elizabeth Law (11), and Shaler Ben Law (10); parents; and siblings, Eugene (Emma) Law, Charles E. Law, Virginia F. Law, Cora L. Law, Nettie May (Frank) Schreiner.

Patrolman Law's remains were carried from his home at 1:30 p.m.

on January 8, 1925 by Covington Patrolmen George Moss, John Beebe, William Mulligan, John Bergman, Philip Schwall, and Benjamin Albers, escorted by a contingent under Covington Lieutenant Alfred Scheld, and taken to Immanuel Baptist Church at 2 p.m. For an hour, hundreds of family, friends, peers, and citizens filed by his open casket. The Golden Rule Lodge of Masons held a service, and a funeral service was officiated by Reverend Cecil Sleete. The church held hundreds and several hundred more stood outside. He was buried in Highland Cemetery in Ft. Mitchell.

INVESTIGATION

Covington Safety Commissioner Theodore Keumper, immediately after the shooting, organized a general manhunt, but with their head and faces covered with caps and handkerchiefs, the only descriptions of the robber(s) were general and could fit almost any man. Not a trace of them was found.

On January 4, 1925, Walter Kruse of Covington, and Frank O'Conner of Los Angeles, using a semiautomatic pistol, hijacked Simon M. Billiter's automobile from his son, William Billiter, at the Mercantile Library Building in Cincinnati. Simon grabbed a shotgun and tracked the men in his car to the Cincinnati end of the Louisville and Nashville (L&N) Railroad bridge, where they were about to pay the toll to cross. When he approached, one of the men reached for his concealed pistol and was dissuaded when Billiter raised his shotgun. One of the men loosely matched the vague description of Patrolman Law's shooter, so he was taken to Cincinnati Police Headquarters for questioning by Chief of Detective Kirgan. On January 7th, Schultz and Kraut came from Covington to view the suspects, but were apparently unable to identify them as the robber or

robbers.

During April 1925, Robert L. Miller was wanted for highway robbery and thereafter suspected of being involved in Patrolman Law's murder. When apprehended in Louisville after an attack on Gallatin County Sheriff Walter Bell, Miller was found to be wanted in three states for felonies and federal crimes. He had claimed that he would kill the first officer who tried to apprehend him. Louis Kraut was unable to identify him either, though there is no evidence that Miller ever again was a free man.

Two years after the incident, the murderers had not yet been identified and we have no indication that they ever were.

EPILOGUE

With a pension of \$42 a month, the widow with three children at home could not survive and pay off the \$300 mortgage on their home. His life insurance policy paid \$203, most of which went toward the funeral, and Patrolman Law had been the only bread winner in the family. The Foltz Grocery and Baking Company started a fund to assist the widow and family with a \$100 donation and the Kentucky Post agreed to collect the donated funds. By January 13th, the fund was moved to the Liberty National Bank and Frank R. Evans agreed to be the fund's Treasurer. Simon Billiter announced that the \$200 reward from the Kroger Company for apprehension of the two men who stole his car would be added to the fund. By the 15th, the amount grew to nearly \$1000. By January 20, 1925, the fund had grown to over \$1500 and a portion was paid to the bank to lift the mortgage from her home. By February 7th, the amount was over \$3400.

Regardless, 16-year-old Farrell had to enter the workforce to

support his mother and family and found employment as an oiler, which he continued until gaining employment as a welder. By 1931, 16-year-old Shaler was occupied as a truck driver, and Frances was a phone operator. Frances married before 1938 and moved out, but Farrell and Shaler lived with and supported their mother until her death in the 30th year after Patrolman Law's death, on April 11, 1954. She is buried next to him.

Irene, Farrell, and Shaler all died without issue in 1978, 1979, and 1982, respectively. Frances and her husband, Edward Richard Murphy, did produce children and Patrolman Law's great-grandchildren grew up in Colerain Township. Of them, only one descendant survives, Patricia Colleen Murphy, a retired professor living in Phoenix, Arizona.

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.

© This narrative was further researched and revised on December 8, 2024 by Cincinnati Police Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired), Greater Cincinnati Police Historical Society President/CEO, including research by 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.